

## For What It's Worth

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/35127379) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/35127379>.

### Rating:

Teen And Up Audiences

### Archive Warning:

No Archive Warnings Apply

### Category:

Gen

### Fandom:

僕のヒーローアカデミア | Boku no Hero Academia | My Hero Academia

### Character:

Midoriya Izuku, Bakugou Katsuki, Kirishima Eijirou, Todoroki Shouto, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Yagi Toshinori | All Might, Class 1-A (My Hero Academia), Tsukauchi Naomasa, Original Female Character(s), Kaminari Denki, Ashido Mina

### Additional Tags:

Bakugou accidentally kills someone, Bakugou Katsuki is Bad at Feelings, Panic Attacks, Hallucinations, Sick Character, Hurt/Comfort, Angst, Bakugou Katsuki Whump, Midoriya Izuku Whump, Emotional Hurt/Comfort, Unreliable Narrator, Betaed, Kirishima Eijirou is a Good Friend

### Language:

English

### Collections:

Creative Chaos Discord Recs, Angsty Katsuki is the best type of story <3

### Stats:

Published: 2021-11-28 Updated: 2022-03-21 Words: 66,174  
Chapters: 12/13

# For What It's Worth

by [VaticanCameo](#)

## Summary

Everything in that alleyway instantaneously faded. Harsh breathing, distant sirens and static white noise filtered to nothing as the world zeroed in on that one figure.

Everything was silent and everything was her.

He could have sworn he saw the muted eyes blink desperately at him as the open mouth dropped wider in a declaration of his guilt.

His own breath caught in his chest, though it had nothing to do with his lungs.

Alternatively: As much as Katsuki Bakugou insisted his opponent 'die' (fellow student, villain or otherwise), he never actually wanted to kill someone. He was a hero.

He was a hero.

Alternatively still: Bakugou accidentally kills a villain and has to deal with both the emotional and official fallout.

# Chapter 1

## Chapter Notes

Ok so I did try to start with a multi-chapter story without writing it all in advance. Bad idea. Sorry. I will go back to Devil's Own at some point. Luckily, this is mostly completed so updates will be regular. I was going to try and write the whole thing first but I've realised as I go along, I think I need some feedback so I know if I'm going in the right direction or if there are any glaring issues!

This story has become absolutely massive somehow and gained a life of its own. There are some CWs for implied acute stress disorder (very similar to PTSD but more, you guessed it, acute with added disassociation symptoms), a brief psychosis episode, implied panic attacks, disordered eating, some graphic descriptions of injury/death (of an OFC in reality and a main character in a dream)/sickness including vomiting and pneumonia. I don't know how this happened either, I'm a monster.

Not too sure of the timeline – I guess it's technically a future fic (towards the end of Y2) with the relationships that developed in the most recent parts of the manga so spoiler warning if you're not up to date! It feels a little AU-y if I'm completely honest. Definitely spoilers up to around chapter 285 though so do be aware.

Also in this story, someone can amp their Quirk up even further with a second dose of Trigger not long after the first because I said so :)

Idk, go with it haha. We'll make up the head canon together!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Deku...”

*The metal of his gauntlets scraped unevenly on the floor, dulling it further and scratching it in a way that, just five minutes ago, would have been completely unacceptable. Inch by agonising inch, he dragged himself closer to the green-coloured blob on the floor; it was hazed by the blood starting to tangle in his eyelashes and stinging his eye.*

*Above him, a stray streetlamp choked and flickered pathetically, its circuits broken and bleeding. The night was entirely devoid of breeze: bitter but tasteless in the stagnant cold.*

*With a final, desperate cry, he gave one last monumental push of his arms and shoulders (which, in reality, only moved him a couple of inches across the asphalt) and his head landed practically on top of the other's heaving shoulder.*

*"Deku..."*

*Silence pressed against the damp walls of the back buildings.*

*Feeling as though his body was gaining incomprehensible mass by the minute, Katsuki managed to manoeuvre his neck just enough to see Deku's face as it scrunched up to accommodate his reedy, gasping breaths that tried valiantly to fill his punctured lung.*

*"Deku..." he rasped out, his arm creeping up in jerks to clumsily but gently tap his partner's chest – to help him time his breaths, to reassure him he wasn't alone or to start a pathetic attempt at stemming the bleeding, he wasn't entirely sure, "K-keep breathing..."*

*His voice was garbled and unfamiliar as his sight whirled and tilted. He groaned, and pinched his eyes shut for a moment, blocking out the piercing green ones staring at him in what could only be shock.*

*"K-K-Kach..."*

*The thin voice made him wrench his eyes back open to face the horrified ones staring intently back at him. They closed as soon as he did, as Deku let out a series of, frankly terrifying, splutters and coughs, blood clinging to the sides of his mouth.*

*“Shut up!”*

*It was meant to be threatening. A gruff warning to cover up the rising fear at the sight of the red on the wrong side of his skin and to also point out the impracticalities of speaking with lungs that were basically hanging in their notice... But it only came out as a shaky, pathetic thing, little more than a breath. He turned his head away, only to come face-to-face with the body crumpled and burned behind them; an uncomfortable numbness replaced the fear as he stared at the corpse.*

*Everything in that alleyway instantaneously faded. Harsh breathing, distant sirens and static white noise filtered to nothing as the world zeroed in on that one figure.*

*Everything was silent and everything was her.*

*He could have sworn he saw the muted eyes blink desperately at him as the open mouth dropped wider in a declaration of his guilt.*

*His own breath caught in his chest, though it had nothing to do with his lungs.*

*All of this did little to sway Deku.*

*“It... It’ll be fine,” he tried to reassure – the blood coating his lips and his voice’s odd, echoing quality in the artificial numbness of Katsuki’s mind*

*made sure he wasn't very reassuring. He clumsily fumbled for the hand still touching his chest. "You had to."*

*Katsuki closed his eyes again and moved his face away as the world became noisy again as he registered the whisper of touch on the back of his hand, "No."*

*He could practically feel the nerd's face fall.*

*"But..."*

*"Stop talking," he choked out harshly.*

*In his pocket, he could feel his phone vibrating frantically as someone tried to call him repeatedly.*

*He could tell Deku wanted to argue more, and he was guiltily relieved for a split second that the conversation was over when the coughing started again, before realising what it actually meant with a jolt of anxiety.*

*"Hey," he mumbled.*

*Deku's breathing sped up again into something closer to hyperventilation.*

*"Hey," he repeated, louder this time, as he rolled further onto his shoulder to move his hand to Deku's opposite arm, "Hey, stop."*

*With growing alarm bordering on horror, Katsuki could only watch and*

*listen as the breaths grew simultaneously more frantic and futile. Nothing was going in, despite the sheer amount of effort, sweat and tears Deku was putting into it. His eyes were wider than ever – Katsuki's heart lurched sickeningly as he registered the honest fear growing in his green irises.*

*“Stay awake.”*

*It was almost pleading.*

*Almost.*

*Bakugou fucking Katsuki did not beg.*

*Especially not to Deku.*

*A pair of clapping footsteps, high pitched and grating in the acoustics of a post-battle alleyway, could be heard distantly getting closer. Deku's tearstained, red-rimmed eyes began to slide shut, even as his arm was roughly shaken.*

*“Hey!”*

*He felt his strength give out moments before his arm did and he twisted himself to land on the icy concrete with the same grace and decorum as a particularly heavy puppet whose strings had spontaneously combusted.*

*Deku did not make a sound.*

*Katsuki stared a little uncomprehendingly at the stars.*

*The stars smirked back.*

\*\*\*

Their task was meant to be a simple one. Isn't that always how these stories go?

After the battle with the Paranormal Liberation Front earned them glowering infamy or tepid glory (depending on who you asked) as well as a whole expanse of dubious media coverage, Class now-2A were *strongly* advised (read: lightly threatened by a grumpy homeroom teacher with even larger bags than usual under his mismatched eyes) to undertake work studies at lesser-known agencies and to keep a low profile whilst gaining invaluable work experience and helping out the recovering community.

The plan was to stay in dorms either in the agency if they had them, or in nearby agency-owned apartments. Their shifts would be in three day clusters, with a requirement to head back to school by train on the third evening to catch up on classes for the following few days.

Kirishima had naturally paired with Bakugou to join an agency run by a pro named Fallacy – a compact but mildly terrifying no-nonsense woman with floating electric blue hair and eyes that changed colour based on the light she was standing in. She could control the weather, but only on a small scale, much to Katsuki's disappointment. What a crazy OP quirk that could have been had she bothered to train it further to have full control over the skies at any given time. No wonder she was just a small-time hero hovering somewhere in the mid-70s on the Hero Billboard.



“Watch your manners, dude,” Kirishima had nudged him with a hardened elbow when he’d expressed his opinion on the weak control she had over her Quirk– the only person on the planet who would dare to a) speak to him like that and b) touch him anywhere near his (embarrassingly ticklish) ribcage. The only person on the planet who could dare to a) speak to him like that and b) touch him anywhere near his (alright, very ticklish) ribcage and live to tell the tale.

“Yeah, Kacchan! Best behaviour eh, buddy? Give us a smile!” Kaminari had teased with a smug smile, popping up out of nowhere behind Katsuki’s spot on the common room sofa, before squealing and dodging a weak explosion aimed his way.

Katsuki had gifted him an absolutely *feral* grin – the kind he only wore when he was elbow-deep in battle, demanding his opponent to “dieeeee!”

He shouldn’t have been surprised, though he couldn’t help the small, habitual snarl of disgust (that didn’t even come close to reaching his eyes anymore) when he and Kirishima entered the revolving doors of the modest hero agency for the first time, numbered briefcases in hand, only to smack straight into a wall of excited muttering... that, really, was far too loud to be called muttering anymore.

“That’s amazing!” a high-pitched voice was enthusing, “An emitter Quirk that can impact the *weather*? I’ve not seen anything like that before except for when All Might literally punched the clouds into raining! And you must be invaluable for rescue missions and recon missions – you could create fog to create a hiding place! Rain to stop fires! Thunder to hide noises you don’t want the villains to hear...”

On and on it went.

Kirishima grinned.

Katsuki's eye twitched.

The stupid Deku hadn't even spotted them yet. What was he doing here?

Fallacy on the other hand was absolutely *lapping* up the attention before she clocked the two new individuals entering the reception area. Deku finally turned to face them, his smile as bright as the sun as he saw who was there.

"Kacchan! Kirishima! What are you doing here?"

Katsuki practically choked with indignation, "What are *we* doing here? What the hell are *you* doing here? This is *our* work study!"

His palms popped in frustration.

Kirishima ignored him.

"Hey, Midoriya, nice to see you, buddy!" He went in for a high-five, "What happened to your other agency? Weren't you signed on at Karma's agency with Iida?"

"Oh, yeah, he got pulled away on a mission overseas. I wanted to go too, but Mr. Aizawa was having none of it, so Karma offered to pull some strings and get me a place here!" Izuku explained, with a respectful nod to Fallacy, "Iida has paired up with Todoroki in the next town over. It was all a bit last minute, so I ended up coming straight here from my mom's at the weekend, otherwise I'd have

commuted in with you both!”

“Kirishima, is it?” Fallacy took her cue to step in, with her hand open for a handshake. Her grip was firm. Manly. Kirishima appreciated her instantly. “Or should I say ‘Red Riot?’” Welcome!”

“Thank you for having us!” Kirishima smiled, his grin competing with Midoriya’s for the sunniest, most genuine grin.

Katsuki was absolutely disgusted by the pair of them.

“Which means you must be Bakugou!” she asserted, marching over to greet him with her arm outstretched. It almost physically pained him but Katsuki, on his very best behaviour, outstretched his hand for a reluctant handshake, “Dynamight! Very excited to have you here.” He owed her as much; it took a very brave (or very stupid) person to know his Quirk and general demeanour yet still offer a hand for him to take.

Katsuki grumbled something he hoped came out as niceties. He wasn’t well-versed in small talk, but he also wasn’t a complete moron. He knew better than to bite the hand that fed him any and all hero experience, even if she wasn’t anywhere near the top five. As Deku had just proven, the hero network was surprisingly small and reputations spread quickly. His was already somewhat tarnished following the first year Sports Festival and he knew that, whilst he wasn’t going to fake being the second-coming of All Might, with his huge grin and reassuring laugh, he did need to make his image a little more “family-friendly” if he ever wanted to beat Deku in the hero rankings.

Fallacy didn’t seem to mind. In fact, she seemed genuinely pleased to meet him. He wasn’t sure what he made of that.

He also wasn't entirely sure what he made of Deku being here. Things were much, *much* better between them recently and, whilst he was grateful for Deku's steady and subtle companionship, it had remained firmly in the background unless they were partnered together for hero work or training. They still had their own group of friends – everyone was friendly with one another of course – but there were defined cliques within the class even so. Deku had IcyHot, Roundface, Frogface and Glasses as his ride or dies and Katsuki himself was quite content with his group that had somehow managed to attach themselves to him and not let go no matter how much he threatened to kill them. They didn't need to orbit each other in such a negative way as they had before. Things were comfortable. Feelings between the two of them ran deep – how could they not, especially after the war – but they remained just that: deep and buried away.

However, they worked well together, he hated to admit. They were both strategists and both absolute power-houses. With Kirishima as a shield, the three of them could potentially be absolutely unstoppable in a fight.

... Or so he had thought.

They had spent that day mostly orientating themselves with the building, their new colleagues and the local area. It was technically a city but, de facto, was more of a large town. Katsuki felt his brow tightening the further they walked together, Deku still spouting his ridiculous (and annoying accurate) observations and analyses of the pro-heroes and one or two sidekicks working with them in the agency. Fallacy seemed thrilled to indulge him and Deku seemed giddy with her undivided attention as she asked questions and threw him scenarios to play with and work out.

Leaving them to their fun, Kirishima held back slightly to walk behind them with his best friend.

“You’re doing good, dude,” he reassured, flashing a smile.

Katsuki grunted in questioning.

“Yeah!” Kirishima continued, “I can barely even see the resentment in your eyes, you’re getting real good at hiding it!”

Katsuki fully scowled this time.

“Oh wait, there it is.”

“Oi! I’ve been absolutely fucking delightful today, thank you *very* much.” He snapped.

The humour didn’t leave Kirishima’s crinkled red eyes, “Exactly! How long can you keep it up before you literally explode? You’ve even let Midoriya talk without even blasting him once!”

“Yeah, and I already regret it. Keep up, would ya?”

Kirishima did a little skip to catch up as Katsuki quickened his pace, but not so much that he’d be drawn into whatever the hell was going on between Deku and his new best friend who actually gave a crap about whatever he was spouting off about now.

“Sooooo, what do you think of the town?” Kirishima questioned, in a scarily accurate replica of Ashido’s tone when she was about to share some particularly juicy gossip as they carried on following after a beat of companionable silence.

“Boring.” Katsuki scoffed, “We’re in for three months of rescuing cats up trees and litter picking.”

Kirishima gave him a thumbs up, “That’s the spirit! At least we’ll be out doing stuff to help better the community! So heroic!”

“Yeah?” Katsuki frowned at his genuine tone doubtfully, “And how the hell do you think a big old boulder like you would be useful in rescuing cats from trees?”

“Ouch,” Kirishima joked, faking a stung hiss, “I’m sure there are some lovely old ladies who wouldn’t mind holding these guns while I help them cross the road.” He flexed his biceps in demonstration and was met with Katsuki’s sceptical raised eyebrow when he looked at him for approval. “There’s nothing manlier than helping the elderly, bro!”

Katsuki gave him a flat look, “Right.”

“Right!”

“You’re so annoying,” Katsuki grumbled, shoving his chin into the high collar of his winter costume.

“What was that?”

“Nothing, and *don’t walk in front of me. Oi! Get back here!*”

Not that Eijirou would ever admit it but Bakugou Katsuki, as always, turned out to be dead right. It *was* boring. Of course, he didn't say it out loud and, of course Midoriya received and carried out every task he was given with enough enthusiasm for everyone, but he could tell that Bakugou was one cat-up-a-tree away from blasting the whole treeline from existence.

However, he had to hand it to him, unless you knew him well, he kept it (reasonably) well hidden.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Bakugou, when it came to carrying out hero work, however minor, was the epitome of professionalism, even if the way he spoke was still a *little* harsher than the average member of the public was used to from the average hero.

However, Dynamight was no average hero.

At some point, Best Jeanist and UA's public relations lessons had rubbed off on Bakugou whether he liked it or not.

Sure, he scared the living crap out of anyone unfortunate enough to approach his temporary desk but, to his credit, he got the job done quicker than anyone else in the agency.

*"It might be shitty, menial work, but I'll still do the best goddamn shitty, menial work out of everyone here. Just you watch."*

And he lived up to those words.

Yes, he'd made a child who had lost a balloon cry, but what's wrong with some manly tears? Character building. And the kid got his balloon back, courtesy of an explosive, gremlin-like madman with a feral, murderous grin and blood-red eyes, so what was the problem?

Despite the fact that that he looked like a raging, murderous sociopath, regardless of whether he was fighting a super-powered super-villain with an impossible number of quirks or putting up missing puppy posters, it clearly didn't dampen the sheer quality of his work as it wasn't long before requests started to come in, requesting him by name.

And whilst he might glare absolute fiery holes into whichever poor admin worker was in charge of passing him assignments, secretly, he felt a smug pull of pride when he noticed how much larger his pile was becoming than Deku's.

"Ha!" he called out across his desk to Deku's with a savage look of glee, "Look at my pile. I'm already beating you, Deku!"

Much to his annoyance, Deku simply smiled at him with a genuine look of pride, "Wow! You must have really made an impression, Kacchan!"

....Well, that was no fun.

"Shut up, Deku," he yelled back.

The annoying idiot simply chuckled and went back to finishing his own paperwork before pausing and swinging his chair back to face Katsuki.



“Although...”

“No.”

Deku tipped a finger to his mouth in that irritating, thoughtful way he always did before he was about to start fucking ruining everything with his endless stream of consciousness.

“You know...” he started.

“Don’t you do it...”

“Imagine just *how many* more cases you’d be requested on if you came across just a little bit friendlier...”

“*Excuse me?* Have you seen how big my pile is compared to –“

“... though, saying that,” Deku barrelled on, “you could use your explosive personality to your advantage with some clever marketing; imagine the revenue and media exposure you could potentially make just being yourself!”

“Of course I could, I’m the be-“

“Though, saying that, a little bit of tact probably wouldn’t go amiss...”

When the fuck did *Deku* get so bold? What? Katsuki does one nice thing for him like take a good old impalement in his place, and now he thinks he can speak to him however he wants? Well, excuse the fuck out of –

“Because there’s definitely a time and a place to be a bit more *kind* you know? And I know you can be and it’s actually super reassuring! *Especially* with children when they’ve lost their special birthday balloon...”

“I’ll definitely lose that special birthday balloon *somewhere* if you don’t shu-“

“...Endeavour always struggled in the ratings, not least because he was up against All Might; I mean, *All Might* of *all* people...” he breaks off into an incredulous chuckle at the very notion of someone competing against his hero.

Katsuki felt the need to throttle him increase significantly.

“... just because his manner was so harsh all the time, right? I mean, it also didn’t help when it all came out that...”

“Ok, you did *not* just compare me to Half n’ Half’s shitty daddy issue...”

“Anyway though, I think you should still be super proud of yourself because... ouch! Hey!”

Katsuki slithered from his seat like a raging serpent as he toed his shoe back onto his foot from where it had bounced off Deku’s head and

onto the tiles, never once breaking eye contact with the shitty nerd, not even to blink.

“Make no mistake: I will kill you if you finish that sentence.”

Deku observed him for a second, before settling on a small, fond smile.

Huh. That was new.

And normally, Katsuki would honestly want to blast that stupid smile off his stupid face but today? Today he let himself warm under it on the inside whilst outwardly scowling at Deku, before spinning aggressively back to his laptop.

Was this character development? Maturity? Katsuki didn't like it.

Thank God at that moment, his Lord and Saviour in the form of Kirishima Eijirou chose that moment to bounce into the office.

“Thank God,” Katsuki growled, grabbing his jacket, “Let's go. Lunch.”

Kirishima blinked, “Uh... ok?”

He looked back over his shoulder, even as Katsuki was practically shoving him out of the room.

“You wanna come, Midoriy- ouch! Stop it, Bakugou!”

Deku waved him off, “No, you’re good. I’m all set!” he held up a disgustingly cute bento box, complete with an adorable furoshiki whimsically adorned with delightful kittens with paws full of idealised sushi. Katsuki gagged at him.

“Gross. We’re getting udon. Oh my *God*, would you hurry the fuck up!?”

“Dude, I’ve literally just got in the door, would you *give me a minute!*?” Kirishima huffed – once again proving that he was the only person on the entire *planet* who could get away with speaking to Bakugou Katsuki like that.

Said walking explosion’s eyes narrowed, “Was that a *tone*?”

Kirishima avoided the question, shouldering his backpack and led the way to the front entrance.

“*Oi! Don’t walk ahead of me!*”

\*\*\*

The udon place they ended up at was a tiny shack of a place on the main road, hidden in the shadow of an ultra-modern office block on one side, and an overgrown cherry blossom on the other.

Katsuki sniffed and almost knocked himself out in his haste to bat away the pink petals that blew into the more gravity-defying tufts of his hair. Kirishima seemed quite content with the collection he had

accumulated among his own spikes, looking like some ridiculous, red-headed and slightly monstrous Disney Princess. Katsuki told him as such. Kirishima only looked more pleased with himself.

Perching on two stools that faced away from the street, Katsuki ordered two of the hottest bowls they had, with extra chillies. There were many things that he (begrudgingly) appreciated about Kirishima and his ability to tolerate the same level of spice as Katsuki only made him (begrudgingly) fonder.

“How was your morning?” Kirishima asked conversationally as he dipped his ceramic spoon into his broth and waited for the steam to clear before starting.

Katsuki shrugged, already shoving noodles into his mouth, “Same old. More requests in than Deku, of course.”

Kirishima pouted, “Aw man. So, I guess you won’t have time to tutor me tonight for that maths test tomorrow?”

“Don’t be fucking ridiculous,” Katsuki snarled, brandishing his chopsticks at his friend like a weapon, “and have you *embarrass* me in front of the rest of those morons? Everyone knows your grades are a reflection of my teaching and I will *not* let Ponytail beat me. You’d better be in my room by seven or... oi, stop looking so pleased!”

“Awww, I love you too man,” Kirishima beamed.

“Fuck’s sake. Eat your goddamn noodles, we’re back on the clock soon.”

“Right,” Kirishima started to poke at the mushrooms floating in the broth with his own chopsticks, “about that. Fallacy’s asked me to go on patrol with one of the sidekicks this afternoon. I’ll be on the other side of town...” He shoved a mushroom into his mouth whole, huffing around it when it burned his tongue, “Sho ahl eet oo aftah n we an het he hrain home ogeher?”

Katsuki looked at him in absolute disgust.

“You’re an animal. Try that again?”

Kirishima swallowed and nursed his burned tongue against the roof of his mouth, “Shall I meet you after and we’ll get the train back to U.A. together?”

“Sure,” Katsuki shrugged then groaned dramatically with realisation, “Can’t believe I’m stuck working with *Deku* all day then. Fallacy’s out on patrol too with some other extras. Guess he’s my back-up today then.”

“*Partner*.” Kirishima corrected him.

“First of all, how dare you?”

“It’ll be good for you both!” Kirishima pressed on, completely uncaring of all the emotional landmines he was currently cheerfully pirouetting over, “I dunno man, it’s been pretty good to see you get on recently, y’know?”

“Don’t make it weird.”

“I’m serious!” he insisted, “You two are *insane* when you actually cooperate. I’d say I was jealous if I wasn’t so damn impressed by it.”

Katsuki didn’t reply, suddenly immersed in the left over few noodles swimming in the bottom of his bowl.

Kirishima frowned.

“What’s up?”

“Nothing.”

“You’re obviously not staring into your food like the opening of some emo music video over nothing, dude.”

“I just...”

It bothered Katsuki how easily Kirishima could pry his thoughts and shit out of him when they were alone. Just another new element to his personality that had been previously untapped before U.A.

“Ugh, *forget it*. I just don’t want to have Deku exposure therapy for that long, that’s all.”

But some habits die hard.

Kirishima was clearly unconvinced but knew when to pick his battles, especially when the conversation wandered into dangerous territory like this.

“Sure, man.” He replied amicably, focusing back on his own food, “So anyway, remember that new manga Kaminari and I were talking about?”

\*\*\*

Here’s the thing. Whilst Bakugou was honestly glad things between he and Deku were comfortable, it didn’t change the fact that the power balance and nature of their ‘relationship’ had been absolutely fucked for so many years. And by ‘absolutely fucked’, Katsuki actually did acknowledge that he had been a bully. A mean one. Someone who, really, shouldn’t have been forgiven so easily in the grand scheme of things.

But such was Deku’s nature. Kindness incarnate. Someone people just *liked* once he’d graduated their shitty middle school and mingled with actual semi-functioning human beings who appreciated that trademark compassion, intelligence and humility. People who looked at Katsuki with scorn when Deku flinched around him, as they should do and as others should have done when they were kids.

He wasn’t going to over-analyse his own inferiority complex when it came to Deku any more than he already had on those sleepless nights following the war. But this all gave way to a new dynamic between the two: one of equality and a genuine, but somewhat amicable, rivalry. Two powerful and motivated heroes, battling for number one, rather than one powerful bully attacking his powerless victim.

Deku, much to Katsuki’s surprise, took to it swimmingly as if he had been waiting for this moment his whole life. He had expected Deku to



remain a nervous wreck around him for some time; a little too clingy, a little too keen... but it seemed he had underestimated him. Again. Deku kept his distance and, as if he were dealing with an injured puppy, allowed Katsuki to come to him in his own time.

It *shouldn't* have surprised him really. Deku was far more secure and happy than he had been nearly, *Jesus*, three years ago now when he had cornered him in the courtyard and threatened him against daring to apply for U.A. in the first place. He had friends and a solid support system in place. Bakugou Katsuki became more of an optional garnish to his life, rather than the sole focus of misplaced hero worship and unconditional, unhealthy respect.

He clearly wanted that optional garnish, but he wasn't going to force it. The ball was firmly in Katsuki's court and, for the first time ever, he didn't want the ball. He wanted to throw that shitty ball right back at the nerd's face to deal with because the crux of the problem was this: he had no idea how to be his friend. His equal.

And somewhere along the line, the last thing he wanted to do was hurt him again.

Keep him on his toes and stop him from going soft, sure. He wasn't going to turn into a complete sap overnight.

But he never wanted to be the reason for the same look on his face as when he told him to jump off the roof ever again.

With Kirishima, things were easy. Kirishima gave back as much crap as he took, albeit with a sunshine smile and a quirk and personality that seemed custom-built to deal with Bakugou and his, literally, explosive nature. They were on the same page almost from day one after Kirishima started to look past his shitty attitude on the surface and started to appreciate what was underneath.

He groaned as he reclined back in his chair and rubbed his eyes, pulling the hood of his sweater that he had pulled over his costume up over his hair. Damn. He wasn't used to staring at a screen for so long and his pile of work requests wasn't getting any smaller either. He'd have to abandon some of these logs soon to finish some of the practical requests before he gouged his own eyes out with boredom and lack of movement.

Izuku came back in from the small kitchen attached to the office space with two steaming cups of green tea, one he placed wordlessly in front of Katsuki's screen who acknowledged him with a jerk of his head and a grunt as he pulled on the cords of his hood restlessly.

They worked in a comfortable silence for a while – the evenings were getting darker earlier and dusk was falling outside to the beat of their clacking keyboards and scribbled notes. Suddenly, an alarm cut through their silent companionship, making Izuku flinch so violently in response, he nearly fell out of his seat.

Assuming it wasn't some shitty fire drill, Katsuki practically leaped out of his chair, ripping off his hoodie and shoving his gauntlets on in record speed. "Yes! Finally!"

"What's going on?" Izuku asked more seriously as one of the sidekicks who had just started her shift anxiously slid into the room.

"Fallacy's requested your presence – they need all the help they can get," she rambled, "I've never heard anything like this here and we just don't have enough offensive Quirks!"

"What about Kiris- Red Riot?" Izuku asked as he shoved on his own gauntlets and bracers, clipping the iron to his shoes once they were

secured with his leg balanced on his spinning office chair for balance.

She shook her head, “No time to wait, he’s on the other side of town but someone will radio him and Thermostat to come over at any minute now. Come on, she’s this way!”

Izuku could practically feel Kacchan buzzing with excitement and adrenaline, and he had to admit, he was feeling as pumped up too, though naturally, he was concerned for the nature of the incident that clearly had the agency riled up. He hoped no one was hurt.

“A villain has started causing all sorts of havoc at the bank – it seems pretty chaotic. I don’t think they had much of a plan and now they’ve cornered themselves. They have some sort of concussive Quirk, so keep your wits about you. One concentrated blast was enough to take out the vault wall and half the town’s cops.”

“Where’s Fallacy?” Katsuki asked, tying his mask on as they practically ran to the door.

“Already there – it’s literally just around the corner, it’ll be quicker to go by foot. I’ll accompany you and we’ll meet with her and the others there. For now, you are *back up*. Do you understand me?” She huffed seriously as they started sprinting down the road, “You’re students and, provisional licenses or not, children. Stay out of the way unless the situation becomes dire, or you’re specifically asked to help.”

“Right.”

\*\*\*

As it happened, the situation was already dire by the time they got there.

The sidekick they were with, Violet Crush, wasn't lying when she said that the agency was lacking in offensive Quirks. It just wasn't the kind of agency or town that required abilities that could cause significant damage, like in a bigger city with higher profile and more violent crime. The worst they dealt with was the occasional burglary or attempted muggings by individuals or small pockets of criminals that were quickly dealt with. Any whiff of anything bigger triggered a team up with heroes with more offensive Quirks from the next town over, usually with the agency that Todoroki and Iida were working at, but this happened twice a year at the very most.

As the three skidded to a halt, the last one standing was Fallacy herself, surrounded by the bodies of her fallen comrades, either in a dazed pile on the floor or completely unconscious, bleeding from their ears.

Her eyes widened at the sight of her colleague; her hands clamped over her own bloody ears. It was the most serious the boys had seen her yet.

"I've called for backup from Hamamatsu's agencies – she's taken something. The villain. I think it's Trigger, her Quirk is insa-" she was drowned out by a deep booming that barrelled towards the heroes like a deadly wave.

"Watch out!" Izuku shouted, as he grabbed Fallacy around the middle whilst Katsuki did the same with Violet and dragged them out of harm's way with a boom and a green spark of lightning.

Even after escaping the worst of it, the concussive wave was too much for Fallacy's already clearly injured head. When Deku looked down to

check on her, she was limp in his arms.

Katsuki cursed, “Dammit.”

Deku gently but quickly placed her on the floor on her side behind a sturdy-looking wall. Not that it would do much good against a direct attack, but it would offer her some sort of protection.

Violet rubbed her ears fiercely, eyes watering. Katsuki considered himself lucky – the recoil and constant noise from his own Quirk had clearly desensitised him somewhat to the percussive damage from this shitty robber’s Quirk. What a waste of time – robbing some random bank in some backwoods town? What was the point?

Deku, for his part, palmed his own ear impatiently, moving his jaw around to pop his eardrums.

“This shitty back up had better hurry up,” Katsuki growled, adjusting his gauntlets as he prepared to launch into battle.

“Wait!” Deku blurted out, a little too loudly; clearly, his hearing was still suffering, “We need to plan this out. We can’t just-“

Another deafening wave barrelled towards them and Katsuki's eyes narrowed a touch when he saw it. There. A white line in the air as faint as a whisper and easily missed in its speed and accompanying sound but distinct enough to- “Dodge!” he screeched over the noise. Deku did so without question, but Violet wasn’t as quick, falling to her knees as blood trickled from her ears.

“It’s literally a *wave* of sound, you can see it!”

Violet stared at him incredulously from her position on the ground, “*Seriously?* How on earth did you...?”

“No time. You: what’s your quirk?” Katsuki snapped, clicking his fingers at her impatiently.

Both her and Deku’s jaws dropped, “Really, Kacchan?” he squeaked incredulously.

The sound came shooting towards them again, both boys leaping to avoid the worst of it, Katsuki once again grabbing the downed sidekick and he propelled himself into the air with a well-aimed explosion. As they landed, he settled her on her feet none-to-gently.

“Uh, I can... compress medium-sized objects into smaller ones. Like in a scrapyards?”

Katsuki stared at her, “*Is that it?*”

She looked affronted, “It’s useful in rescue missions!”

“You’re like the dollar store version of Mr. Compress, *what’s the point?* How far away are the other pros?”

“Red Riot and Thermostat are about fifteen minutes, give or take. The other pros? Could be up to an hour.”

Katsuki cursed, "I'm calling this 'dire'- we're helping. Deku?"

Deku squared himself, lightning cracking around his body once more, "Ready."

Violet looked very torn for around half a second before rolling to dodge a piece of wreckage from the damaged bank wall as it flew past her face with another dramatic blast of sound. She faced them again with a hardened look on her face, "Fine. Just... don't die, alright?"

Katsuki was off like a shot with a flash of light and own loud boom to accompany it. Deku wasn't far behind, darting between wall faces to follow his now-partner.

The villain quickly came into view. She was probably in her early-twenties, surely no older than twenty-five and she was strikingly plain-looking. Her bobbed black hair was completely askew as tears ran down her face and she had – Katsuki cursed at the sight – a goddamn katana in a sheath wrapped around her waist.

"What? You steal that from a museum on the way here? Quirk too weak to take us on without a weapon, you coward?"

"Stay back, heroes! Don't come any closer!" she shrieked, as she released her Quirk desperately once more.

Izuku paused on the roof. She didn't seem like a full-time, maniacal villain. She seemed despairing and out of control. Before he could shout anything to Violet or Kacchan, the latter appeared out of the dust from the most recent attack like a ghoul, screaming '*dieeee!*' as he aimed a blast at the robber's feet to knock her off-balance.

Her returning shriek felt like it was stripping away their eardrums. Katsuki landed roughly on the pavement as he miscalculated the level of force needed to stay in the air from the shock of the high-pitched attack. The sound destabilised the façade of the roof above him and Deku cried in alarm as bricks and tiles began to shower his friend, unable to get there quite in time to divert it with a well-placed shootstyle kick.

Suddenly, there was a bright flash of purple sparkles as the debris immediately shrunk to a harmless piece of rubble, no bigger than a large coin.

Katsuki spun to look at Violet who had dragged herself into the battle, leaning against the wall with her hand outstretched. She looked simply back at him before her eyes rolled back and she joined Fallacy on the ground.

He quickly snapped his face away from her and launched himself back into the air as he recognised the oncoming sound of a blast, aiming himself at one of the standing walls to bounce himself back towards the villain with another explosion, again aiming at her feet to subdue her but with a little more force. This time, she stumbled, paying more attention to the hero that hadn't fallen with her enhanced Quirk.

Her face crumpled, "Let. Me. GOOO." Her voice raised impossibly loud and high as she screamed. Katsuki felt himself pushed backwards by the force of it, swearing loudly as he could feel blood starting to trickle from his own ears. He pushed himself against it, arms covering his face but stumbled when the sound suddenly stopped.

Deku had jumped in like the goddamn hero he was, wrapping his legs around the villain like a limpet and pinning her to the floor. He wasn't quick enough with his Quirk suppression cuffs however, and her resulting screech immediately knocked him back, with blood of his own to match Katsuki's trickling down his neck.



“God fucking dammit!”

“Now I see why Kouda and Jioru had such a hard time with Present Mic!” Deku winced as he returned to his fighting stance, before dodging another piece of falling debris. He used the momentum to dart back towards the robber who had started to sprint away, stumbling over the wreckage on the floor.

Katsuki almost sensed it before he saw it. The woman had unsheathed her sword and was brandishing it like a child mimicking a pirate. She slashed it towards Deku who leapt back, dodging it easily.

“You don’t have to do this!” he tried to reason, dodging again as she repeated her attack.

Katsuki glared at him, aghast, “What the hell are you *doing*, Deku?” he launched himself towards her like a grenade, “Just take her down already!”

They were both forced to double over and cover their ears again as she wailed with even more force, pushing them back away from her. They were at an impasse. Her Quirk was a bit of a one-hit wonder and she had nearly no technique to speak of – however, it was effective in keeping them back and slowing them down. The heroes had to be careful to avoid walls with their own Quirks whilst minimising the damage from hers, which would cause a large amount of collateral damage from the few civilians, police officers and pros caught up in and downed by the initial attack, and vulnerable to collapsing debris. Her damaged reasoning, thanks to the Trigger, along with a lack of technique made her difficult to predict...the ever-pressing darkness of the early winter evening and one surviving streetlamp wasn’t helping things either.

Before the pair could regroup, the woman reached into her pocket once more.

Katsuki barely had the time to furiously think *what now!?* before she was slamming another needle into her arm. The boys rushed at her, but it was too late.

“For *fuck’s* sake!” he roared just as the villain’s wail began to crescendo to an unbearable pitch and volume.

This was where things got confusing.

The wall that Fallacy was hiding behind began to *shatter*, interrupting Deku’s next dodge-attack-dodge routine. He skidded and Blackwhip shot to life, grabbing the pro and shooting her out of the way just in time. He made a fatal error however and span back to face his attacker... just as she began waving her sword again.

Katsuki swore and threw himself in with a short and bright explosion to propel him along, knowing already he was too late. The sword was already buried to the hilt in Deku’s chest and he went down like a rock.

Mindlessly, she grabbed the handle as he was falling to turn it on Katsuki who had to quickly blast to the left to divert away.

The woman let out another concussive blast that knocked him off course and made his head scream along with her but this time, experience meant he could balance out his flight pattern and he landed, harder than planned but still safely, against the wall to slide down onto his feet. Not wasting any time, he shot back towards her with a shout of rage. She seemed to be learning quickly though and, still brandishing her bloody sword, she sent a mind-numbing

shockwave directly at him. Head swimming and ears throbbing, he tried to dodge the worst of it but was less accurate than he had been before and the wave caught the very bottoms of his boots, slamming him against the wall behind him. His skull caught the brick with a sickening crack and the next thing he knew, he was flat on his back with a shrieking woman and a crimson katana saddling his hips.

The noise kept on coming, almost blinding him in its intensity. Onto his face, blood dripped from the blade and from her hands where one held the blade as he used his gauntlets to brace it away from his throat.

He managed to shove her off and away from him with a blind explosion easily enough but then she rolled and tried to run again in Deku's direction.

And, once again, Katsuki's body moved before his brain did.

He pulled the pin on his gauntlet.

Semi-blindly again, he threw a huge explosion at the blurry figure of the villain, once more trying to aim for her feet. For all he screamed and spat at his opponents to die, he didn't actually *want* to kill them if he could help it – contrary to what some media bodies may try to spin, he wasn't actually a villain.

He realised a split second too late how lucky he was for the blast to miss Deku's body given how much his vision was dulling. He realised a split second too late that the blast didn't hit her feet, but instead caved in the back of her head.

For a devastating second, as the blinding light from his explosion faded, he watched as her body span from the force of the blast. The

last glowing embers of the curling flames sparkled in the tears trickling down her cheekbones like a peaceful spring. Her eyes swam with a deep sadness that struck him to his very core and he stared, wide-eyed as time seemed to stop. Her scream rang in the air.

She dropped. The screaming stopped. Everything was silent.

Katsuki's shoulder twinged, and he fell backwards onto the ground, panting and squeezing his eyes shut against the concussion he knew he had just been gifted with.

What the fuck just happened?

The fight, if it could even really be called that, couldn't have lasted more than a few minutes yet it was absolute carnage.

Walls were destroyed, debris was scattered over the victims of the attack who were now a few feet away as the fight had moved away from them, the villain was down and Deku... with a pained grunt that made his head spin even further, Katsuki started a stiff crawl towards the downed hero.

He cried out in frustration as his stupid body just would not go any faster. The concrete beneath him felt like water tipping him to-and-fro, occasionally knocking him almost flat on his face.

As much as he wanted – no, *needed* – to check on Deku, he paused at the villain, checking she was still down before he turned his back on her and left them wide open to a second attack. He didn't blast her that hard, did he? Just enough to keep her down for a few minutes at least. He fumbled with the cuffs in his pocket with numb fingers as he forced himself closer to her. He paused as his palm hit something damp, moisture seeping into his gloves. He stared at his hands

dumbly, the cuffs slipping from his fingertips and blinking as his suffering eyesight struggled to compensate the darkness and understand the colour he was seeing. The copper smell was unmistakable however, and completely overwhelming and he had to steel himself from gagging as it sent a spike through his tender skull.

“What the f-“ his whispered question was cut off abruptly as his jaw went slack at the sight that met his eyes as he stared at the villain whilst balancing on all fours.

“No.” he mumbled dumbly, “No. Why are you...?”

The woman’s blank eyes stared back at him, still red-rimmed from the Trigger and the tears cutting tracks down her face. Bakugou inched closer and covered her bleeding head futilely with his already bloody hand, “Hey,” he rasped, “Are you awake?”

She didn’t blink or move or gave any indication that she had heard him. He dragged himself onto his knees, “Hey!” he tried a little louder, giving her arm a shake, “*Hey!*”

The silence dragged on, and a sudden spike of realisation spiked through his stomach, causing it to jolt unpleasantly. He twisted to the side and collapsed back onto his forearms as the dread and realisation coated a bitter taste on the back of his tongue as he threw up violently.

The only sounds that filled the alley were his painful coughing and retching, until a new sound cut through the darkness.

“*Kacchan?*”

Right. Deku. The villain was dead- unconscious. Deku had been stabbed by a fucking katana. *Focus Katsuki for fuck's sake and triage.* He tried to push himself up from his hands and knees but gave up on that pretty quickly as everything went sort of sideways and an uncomfortable rushing filled his ears.

Crawling it was.

The metal of his gauntlets scraped unevenly on the floor, dulling it further and scratching it in a way that, just five minutes ago, would have been completely unacceptable. Inch by agonising inch, he dragged himself closer to the green-coloured blob on the floor, hazed behind the blood starting to tangle in his eyelashes to sting in his eye.

Above him, the stray streetlamp choked and flickered pathetically, its circuits broken and bleeding. The night was entirely devoid of breeze: bitter but tasteless in the stagnant cold.

With a final, desperate cry, he gave one last monumental push of his arms and shoulders (which, in reality, only moved him a couple of inches across the asphalt) and his head landed practically on top of the other's heaving shoulder.

"Deku..."

## Chapter End Notes

Ok I'm super anxious about posting this; I feel a bit out of my depth - please let me know your thoughts!

Like I said, this is mostly written so there'll be a reasonably regular update schedule - I'm thinking once a week :) 8 chapters is the current estimate, 6 are written.

# Chapter 2

## Chapter Notes

Bit earlier than planned but I felt like uploading this evening!  
Thank you so much for the kudos/bookmarks and comments - I really appreciate it!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Bakugou!”

The smirking stars sounded awfully familiar.

“Bakugou!”

And irritatingly loud.

“Can you hear me?”

Something started infuriatingly tapping on his cheeks. Katsuki groaned, cursed and forced his eyelids open. He tried to lift his arm to bat away at whoever the *fuck* thought it was acceptable to touch him, but he groaned as his shoulder gave a particularly loud complaint about it. At least it cleared his head for a moment.

Kirishima’s terrified face swam into view.

“Thank God, man, you had me worried for a minute there.”

“Took you long enough,” Katsuki grumbled as a greeting.

Kirishima gave a weak smile, “Medics and the police are a few minutes out, the back-up pros aren’t far behind – where are you hurt?”

With a groan, Katsuki shoved his prying hands away again when they tried to search through his hair for the source of the blood coating his neck. The hands insistently returned and he batted them away once more. Why were they fussing over him? There was a woman with a head injury and a Deku with a hole in his chest.

“Deku.” He demanded.

Kirishima simply batted his hands away this time and continued his examination, “Someone’s already with him man, look.”

Katsuki turned his head with difficulty, wincing his eyes shut at the vertigo and noted, with some alarm, that some random extra Kirishima had been patrolling with had somehow slipped next to him without him noticing and was pressing his cape into Deku’s chest, two fingers shoved into the junction between his neck and his shoulder.

The white cape was already horrifyingly wet and saturated with red. Katsuki swallowed and turned his head back as Kirishima started to poke and prod at his ears. He risked jerking his head away and couldn’t help the pathetic whine that fell out – he felt like he was shoving his own brain through a food processor every time he moved more than half an inch.

“The girl. Check the girl first. Head injury.”



Kirishima's face dropped along with his hands. He gently put his palms on both of Katsuki's cheeks.

"What are you – get your hands off of me and go help her!"

"Bakugou," Kirishima said, in the most serious tone he had ever heard him use, "There's nothing I can do for her."

Katsuki scoffed, "Bullshit. I helped you ace those first aid practicals."

Kirishima bit his lip with a serrated tooth, "Bro..." he winced further as Katsuki started to wriggle around again, trying to throw him off.

"Stop fucking around and help her, asshole," he demanded with a look of incredulity. He felt like he was living in some sort of nightmare where *no one was fucking listening to him*.

"Stop." Katsuki simply wriggled harder, grunting with the effort. "Katsuki!"

The use of his given name stopped him with surprise and Kirishima took the opportunity to grab his face again.

"Listen to me." Still so serious. Katsuki felt a hysterical need to laugh. "Listen. You know the priority – the living need to come first. There's *nothing* I can do for her. Do you understand what I'm saying to you?"

This time, Katsuki did give out a slightly hysterical bark of laughter, “What? What are you talking about? Why are you giving up? Why isn’t anyone doing... doing CPR or *something*? What kind of ‘sturdy’, ‘manly’ hero doesn’t even *try* to save someone?” He started moving again, thrashing this time to prove his point, despite the absolute agony it drummed up in his skull. He could feel blood trickling down his cheek again, but he didn’t care. Why the fuck wasn’t he helping? “Fucking let go of me, Shitty-Hair you useless bastard, get off of me and help her!”

Kirishima just calmly and somewhat grimly held his shoulders down, simply waiting until Katsuki wore himself out or passed out. Frustrated tears built up in the corner of Katsuki's eyes as he carried on his verbal assault before he eventually collapsed back against the pavement, too angry and exhausted to carry on.

He turned his head back to the woman and breathed out a sigh of horror when he realised the cape that was usually around Kirishima’s waist, pinned with his R badge, was covering the woman’s face, adding to the cascade of red around her.

“Why have you covered her face?” he forced out, his throat feeling like it was scraping on sand, “She can’t breathe, take it off.”

He felt Kirishima gently moving his head back to centre, taking the opportunity to brush away the tears from earlier as he leaned in close.

“Just look at me, man, keep your eyes on me.”

Sirens that were a million miles away just moments before were suddenly uncomfortably close, piercing through his eardrums like needles. He screwed up his eyes at the pressure they and the sudden flashing lights brought with them.

“It’s going to be alright, buddy.”

“*Deku?*”

“Right next to you man, he’s still breathing. We’ll get you both help.”

Calloused thumbs continued to rub minutely at the side of his head.

“And you’ll help her too, right?” he mumbled, too far gone to feel as pathetic and appalled as he usually would do at being heard sounding so vulnerable.

If Kirishima gave an answer, he didn’t hear it as the ground swallowed him whole.

\*\*\*

He came to violently, already gagging as the ground below him swayed brutally.

He was leaning forward, only keeping his balance and not toppling over onto his face thanks to a strong arm around his chest, holding a cardboard... something to his face as he lost pretty much everything he had ever put in his stomach.

The sharp taste of his regurgitated udon bowl, complete with the burning of extra chillies at the back of his throat, did not make things

any more pleasant. He was pretty sure the strawberry flavoured All Might cake from his sixth birthday was also coating the back of his throat, such was the intensity of his stomach's rebellion.

"Fuck *me*," he cringed rolling back away from the restraint, and clamping his hands to the side of his head, just in front of his sensitive ears.

"Hey," a too-loud, too-rough voice practically punched him in the face, "You with us, bro?"

He croaked angrily at the voice and curled back on the ground to cover his eyes with his knees. Wait. Not the ground. It was too soft, and it wouldn't. stop. swaying.

He whined softly into the pillow under his head and shoved his face into its folds none-too-gently. He felt so shitty that he didn't even care how pathetic it sounded... maybe someone might get the hint and make the ground stop doing whatever the fuck it was doing.

"Alright, easy buddy," the voice came back, a little quieter this time, and he felt a steady hand on his shoulder. He welcomed it. It stilled his body a little.

He peeked a cracked open eye from the depths of the pillow he was lying on and blinked in confusion. Kirishima blinked worriedly back at him, his hair catching in the fluorescent white lighting. He scrunched his eyes back up again.

"S'it so bright?" he complained, shoving his arm over his face for good measure. His... very, very light arm. "What the..." he blinked blearily up at his forearm, "... w'the fuck are my gauntlets?"

Kirishima cupped a large hand over his eyes, protecting them a little from the light so he could see and looked at him intently, “Don’t worry, one of the pros from the agency is keeping hold of them – do you know where you are, bud?”

Katsuki sniffed, offended. What a stupid question. He wasn’t a lost puppy.

Kirishima looked at him expectantly and Katsuki opened his mouth to answer.

His brain froze.

“Uh.”

Smooth.

A small smile tugged at Kirishima’s lips, “Don’t worry,” his voice held an edge of humour to it, “I won’t tell anyone. You’re in an ambulance, we’re going to the hospital. Scrambled your brain pretty impressively there, dude.”

That... made a lot of sense, actually.

Wait.

*Shit.*

He shot up, much to Kirishima's alarm and, apparently, that of a medic who had been doing something out of sight who reached over to help Kirishima push him back down. It didn't take much. The nausea that had been rumbling in the background jumped up with him, but he shoved it down impatiently.

"Where's Deku?" he demanded, grabbing Kirishima's arm in his urgency and trying to sit up again. Kirishima kept him down with embarrassing ease.

"Relax, man, he's just ahead of us."

"You left him *alone*?"

A troubled look passed over his friend's face that he quickly hid behind a tight smile that didn't quite reach his eyes, "There wasn't enough space – the medics needed the room." He admitted.

Katsuki felt a tight fist forming around his heart.

"But he's alive?"

Kirishima risked losing an arm by putting his hand at the top of his head. It was warm. Grounding. Katsuki would happily go this grave keeping that thought a secret though.

"Yeah. He's in good hands, nothing a good healing Quirk can't fix!"

His optimism came off as weak and tasted bitter in the air around him, even with that reassuring smile affixed to his face.

Katsuki had seen that smile before. It was the smile of a hero trying to reassure a victim during the worst day of their lives.

Fuck that, he wasn't anyone's victim.

"What about the girl?"

Kirishima exchanged a look with the medic.

Katsuki frowned. The world tilted sickeningly again; he felt his vision starting to darken once more. This was getting real fucking old real fucking quick.

"Oi! *What about the girl?*" he insisted, a little desperately (though Bakugou Katsuki did not do 'desperate') as he tried to resist the urge his eyes had to roll back into his skull.

"Don't worry about her," Kirishima said quietly, "Someone's taking care of her."

Satisfied, Katsuki let himself relax, his grip loosening on Kirishima's arm.

"Hey, nope, stay with me, Bakubro. Hey!"

Katsuki ignored him.

*Don't tell me what to do, Shitty-Hair* was his last slurred thought before he knew nothing again.

\*\*\*

The next time he woke up was a little more pleasant.

His head felt almost normal, if a little foggy and clogged as if he had taken a too-long nap in the middle of the day and woken up too close to bedtime.

The only indication that there was anything all that wrong boiled down to three anomalies.

1. His mouth tasted like something had crawled into it and rudely died. He had definitely not destroyed all his gross mouth germs with his toothbrush last night.
2. His stomach was sinking, weighed down by an uncomfortably familiar emotion that he couldn't quite place.
3. Someone was fucking *touching* him and breathing into his ear.

He jerked at the third realisation as if he had just realised there was a particularly venomous spider on his arm, forcing himself to the furthest edge of the bed as possible without falling off of it.

The cold and clinical smell of antiseptic and hand sanitiser filled the air.



Oh *goodie*.

The hand that had been invading his personal space had wisely moved and was now rubbing a familiar face that looked just as groggy as he felt.

Kirishima.

“Bakubro!” he sounded genuinely pleased to see him (which was a concept Katsuki was still trying to wrap his head around and not feel uncomfortable about) despite the dark rings decorating his eyes, “Musta fallen asleep. How you feelin’?”

Katsuki stared at him with a standard frown marring his features. He hesitatingly moved himself back to the centre of the bed and leaned back against the wall, slapping away his friend’s hand that re-appeared out of nowhere, presumably to help him.

He vaguely remembered the same hand rubbing his face comfortingly. Katsuki shoved *that* particular memory down into to the darkest, murkiest depths of the box in which he kept his more disturbing memories.

Kirishima folded his arms easily instead. He was wearing fresh civilian clothes – a simple white top and jeans with standard hospital guest slippers... definitely not the clothes he had worn at the agency before changing into his costume earlier that... day? Week?

“How long have I been here?”

“Not that long, considering.” Kirishima replied, “It’s been two days.”

“Considering what?”

Kirishima sighed, “Considering how bad off you were when we found you. You really scared me, man.”

Katsuki shifted uncomfortably at the concern.

“You didn’t need to stick around, you idiot – we were meant to be back at school.”

“I wasn’t about to leave you both.” Kirishima said firmly in a tone that left no room for argument. In a lighter voice he added: “Mr. Aizawa didn’t say anything about it either.”

Katsuki's standard frown turned into one of his more agitated ones.

“Aizawa’s here?”

“Of course he is. He’s with Midoriya right now though – you missed him earlier.”

Oh shit. That was right. Was that where the uncomfortable sinking sensation was coming from? Was it worry?

Bakugou Katsuki did not worry. Especially about little green nerds who stepped in the way of swords. Not to anyone’s face, anyway. He swallowed and cleared his throat.

“Nerd’s still alive then?”

He tried for causal nonchalance. As if he were asking about the weather or insulting Kaminari’s intelligence.

Kirishima clearly saw right through him.

Asshole.

“It was a bit touch and go for a while there, but I think he’ll pull through.”

Deku had to be literally the hardest thing to kill on this planet. He was *literally* a cockroach. The relief (that he refused to acknowledge) didn’t lighten the weight in his stomach much though. Something else was up.

Kirishima rubbed his eyes again. Katsuki’s eyes sharpened.

“Oi. When was the last time you slept, Shitty-Hair?”

He wasn’t concerned. Not at all.

Kirishima smiled sheepishly, “I have actually been going to bed pretty regularly, bro, honest. Todoroki, Class Pres and I have been here in shifts. It’s just... been kinda hard to fall asleep.”

That piqued his interest.

“What are those losers doing here?”

“Their agency was one of the ones called as back-up – when they heard you and Midoriya were involved, apparently they insisted on coming.”

Katsuki scoffed.

“Sounds about right.”

“Mmmhmm. They’re good guys. They’ve just been staying in my room when they’ve not been here.”

“What? And U.A.’s just alright with half its students bunking off class?”

Something crossed Kirishima’s face. It was quick and rapidly smoothed down, but Katsuki’s eyes were quicker.

“What?”

“What?”

“What was that look?”

The agitated from became a suspicious one. Katsuki had approximately 52 distinct frowns and if Kirishima made his eyebrows cycle through every single one of them by the end of this conversation, Kirishima would have *his* singed off, he swore to God.

“What look?”

“You’re a shitty liar.”

Kirishima looked uncomfortable, “Look, man.” He rubbed his neck. A classic tell that he was feeling put on the spot. He *was* hiding something. “There’s a bit of a... media presence outside the school right now.”

Katsuki looked blank.

“Why? It wasn’t that big a fight.”

Now Kirishima looked a little concerned and didn’t say anything. He couldn’t seem to find the words he was looking for.

An awkward silence filled the room.

One that was luckily broken by the click of the door being opened. The looming and slightly energy-sucking figure of their teacher filled the doorway.

“Sir,” Kirishima greeted, looking grateful.

“Kirishima.” He nodded in greeting. “Bakugou. Glad to see you’re back with us.”

Katsuki grunted.

Aizawa turned his attention back to his other student drily. “Did you think to inform anyone that their patient’s condition had significantly changed?”

Kirishima looked absolutely mortified as he jumped up, “*Crap*. Sorry, sir. I’ll let someone know.”

Aizawa simply raised an eyebrow at him as he hurried out of the room, sparing a somewhat sympathetic look back at Katsuki who scowled at him. Frown #4. *Betrayal*. How dare he abandon him to his fate like this? One-to-one discussions with his teachers were already annoying enough, let alone when he was stuck in a hospital bed. The obvious power imbalance and vulnerability made him want to punch something. He supposed that made him a hypocrite really, given his preference to be the strongest person in the room, but he wasn’t going to lose any sleep over it.

Aizawa hooked Kirishima’s abandoned chair with his foot and slumped into it.

He also looked tired but, then again, that wasn’t exactly a remarkable observation when it came to his teacher.

There was a pause.

“How are you feeling?” He eventually asked, loosely clasping his hands across his lap.

“Fine, I guess.” Katsuki grunted.

“You had everyone worried.”

“So I’ve been told.”

There was another uncomfortable silence before Aizawa leaned forward, just a touch.

“How much did Kirishima tell you?”

“Not much. He’s hiding something though. I’m not stupid.”

Aizawa sighed.

“How much do you remember?”

Katsuki gave this a moment’s thought, though he had been expecting the question.

“It’s a bit of a blur,” he admitted reluctantly, “I definitely remember being blasted into a wall, that sucked. The villain, she had a sword. Some stupid katana like she was in some stupid action B-movie. She got Deku.” He paused, a flash of a memory running through his mind that he chased. It got away. “She got Deku and then she tried to get

me. I managed to throw her off though and then..." *The click of his gauntlet pin. The huge explosion aimed at her feet that actually landed on her...* "Shit."

Aizawa let out a huff but there was no humour behind it. "Shit indeed."

"Is she... alright?"

At this, Aizawa stopped still and stared at him. It only took a second, but a myriad of emotion scrolled though his remaining black eye before they were all replaced by a well-trained impassive look in the time it took him to blink.

"Kid."

He didn't like that tone.

*Don't 'kid' me. Tell me what the fuck is going on.*

"Look, there's no easy way to tell you this..." he paused, as if considering how much detail to go into until he settled on simply saying: "She's dead."

Katsuki stared at him. The world stopped spinning. The bustling sound outside of his room faded to nothing. His heart seemed to alternate between stopping completely and throwing itself against his chest so hard, he thought it would punch its way out of his chest. She was dead, she was dead, she was dead, he *killed*...



“...id? *Bakugou.*”

His head snapped back towards his teacher. He could feel his eyes were wide but couldn't seem to pull them back to neutral. The impartial mask was slipping from Aizawa's face. His expression was almost... pitiful.

“No.”

Aizawa's expression was interrupted. He hadn't been expecting that.

“No?”

“She's not dead.” Katsuki said simply.

He had aimed for her feet. *He had aimed for her feet.* Sure, his aim may have been a *little* off. A concussion and the stress of battle will do that to you. But... *he had aimed for her feet.* She wasn't dead. There was a mistake. He was a *hero*.

*He was a hero.*

*She was d—*

***He was a hero.***

Aizawa's face was bordering on pity again.

And panic unexpectedly slammed into Katsuki like a train.

The world went silent again but terrifying quickly, rather than the slow fade-out of before. All he could hear was his heartbeat, roaring at him in anger. All he could feel was a vice, squeezing his lungs until he couldn't scream or shout, even if he wanted to. All he could smell was antiseptic and *blood, blood, blood all over his gloves*. All he could taste was death. All he could see was her face, her lifeless eyes staring as she accused him.

Murderer.

*Villain.*

Vaguely, Aizawa's voice started to interrupt the silence, somehow breaking through and joining him as he spiralled down, down, *down*.

"C'mon kid, breathe with me."

He started to feel someone clasping his wrist, tight enough to bruise and pressing it against something warm and moving.

He tried to match his breaths to it. Tried to follow the counting.

But every time his brain started to be lulled by the calming routine, her face reappeared out of the shadows and made his breath catch again and again and again and again and...

He could sense more people around him and something intrusive was pressed to his mouth.

He was suffocating.

He couldn't breathe.

But then neither could she.

So that was the crushing yet familiar sinking feeling in his stomach, was it?

Guilt.

\*\*\*

Todoroki sat perfectly silently and still, a book held in front of him in one hand, whilst his other was tucked between his knees. Occasionally, his hand left its warm hiding place to turn a page, but his eyes were listless; it was clear to anyone who saw him that none of the words on the page were actually being acknowledged, though it seemed important to allow him to keep up the impression of doing something productive.

His pulse had long ago synced with the steady beating of the heart monitor next to him and his back was starting to cramp with how stiffly he was holding himself. It was almost soothing – a mild form of self-flagellation. Quite simply, if he had been quicker, this wouldn't have happened.

He knew this was irrational, of course. But either way, who was he to complain of a minor backache compared to his friend who was lying in front of him with a barely closed-up hole in his chest?

Said friend had just come out of his second surgery, thankfully still breathing. He had briefly woken up directly afterwards and the doctors deemed him alive enough to go back to his room to sleep it and a round of Quirk healing off; he hadn't moved since.

The oxygen mask was too big for his face. It made Todoroki feel a little uncomfortable in the bottom of his stomach to look at him for too long, so he stared at his book instead.

The door had opened near-silently at some point during his vigil and a figure had slipped in to lean against the wall behind him. They clearly didn't want to be spoken to and Todoroki was more than happy to oblige. Small talk had never really been a strength of his and he didn't intend to start practising today.

And so the hours marched on dutifully.

The cool silence that filled the room was eventually cracked as Todoroki raised his hand once again to obediently turn a page as one did when they were reading, only to pause as a new sound joined the mix of mindless droning outside the room, the heart monitor and the beating of his own heart in his ears. A mumble.

Todoroki raised a slim brow in interest and set his book down gently on the bedside cabinet, looking over the boy he was determined to vigil over.

He wasn't exactly sure when this had happened – it would be hard to pinpoint the exact moment it became acceptable for him to be *that*

*person* waiting at someone else's bedside without it being incredibly awkward or out-of-character for all persons involved, but it was probably at some point during their first year. It was probably somewhere between the first run in with Stain in that dank alleyway and when he invited Midoriya and Bakugou to work at his father's agency.

Whilst he would like to think he had worked past a lot of his anger and resentment during his first eighteen months at U.A., it didn't change his personality overnight. He knew he still came across as aloof and standoffish. This was partly down to his natural personality, he guessed (and there wasn't any changing that) but coming to terms with his childhood and family experiences didn't change the fact that his upbringing gave him little time to practice his social skills. It wasn't a great mix of nature or nurture in that respect.

Midoriya seemed to be immune to this, however.

Midoriya seemed to decide that he liked him and once that judgement had been made, nothing was going to deter him from making friends.

To begin with, it had spooked Todoroki a little. That much attention aimed at him had never ended well. But eventually, he came to accept that Midoriya was a tenacious little barnacle who wasn't going to drop anything he set his mind to, regardless of the reaction of the person he was trying to save. His relationship to Bakugou was a very good example of this fixed mindset. He slowly came to accept that Midoriya was one of the kindest and most genuine people he had met, and even so, he didn't display kindness simply for the sake of being... well, kind. It didn't come from a place of pity or self-importance – it came from an inherent desire to make people happy and a genuine appreciation of friendship. He knew he came to that conclusion far quicker than the alleged genius Bakugou Katsuki and he was grateful for it.

He knew he wasn't always the best at displaying his affection, but his

first friend quickly became someone he considered his closest.

And it tore him up inside to see him in such a state.

He was the last person, as far as Todoroki was concerned, who deserved to be hurt in any way.

Midoriya's eyes fluttered a little, and he screwed up his nose as he slowly came to.

"Midoriya." Todoroki greeted cordially as he peered at him critically, "It's good to see you."

Midoriya blinked at him a few times, looking confused.

"Todoroki?" he whispered. Todoroki grimaced – he sounded like he had swallowed a handful of gravel and gargled it around his throat for a bit.

"I'll see if you're allowed some water. Hold on."

He pushed the little call button at the side of the bed and then his focus went straight back to his friend, who was somehow looking paler by the second.

He reached out a little hesitatingly and placed a cooled hand on his forehead, "Are you alright?"

He could see Midoriya's lips tightening under the mask and realised just in time what was happening. He grabbed the mask and shoved it down under his jaw, simultaneously grabbing a disposable bowl for this very purpose that was very conveniently placed beside his book's resting place. Midoriya lurched forward as much as his underused muscles allowed him and started gagging immediately.

Todoroki simply placed an arm under his back, unsure if he was doing the right thing, and held him upright as he dry-heaved over the basin.

Unfortunately, this set off a fairly horrifying chain reaction. As he gagged, his chest jumped violently, which clearly set off a wave of pain throughout him. He gagged once more, crying out in obvious agony, as tears started to run down his cheeks. Alarmed, Todoroki held him even tighter, as if to hold him together.

"It's alright. It's ok," he babbled – was that the right lie to tell someone at a time like this? "Someone's coming. Don't worry."

The heart monitor had sped up with worrying intensity, echoing his jack-rabbling heart.

Midoriya weakly called out again, before retching for a final time, gasping thinly for breath. He panted for a moment or so, gripping onto one of Todoroki's arms for purchase. When he was sure it wasn't needed anymore, Todoroki grimaced and put the empty bowl to one side – he knew well enough that sometimes dry-heaving was worse than just throwing up and getting rid of whatever was making you feel sick in the first place. With both hands now free, Todoroki took the opportunity to push the call button a couple of more times before placing one around Midoriya's other shoulder and holding him close as he sobbed. He could feel the tears soaking through his jumper. He felt the thin material of the hospital gown bunching up and smoothing out as his hands rubbed his friend's back of their own accord.

He swallowed, feeling cold. Midoriya was making some truly heart wrenching noises in his arms as he struggled with the pain of moving so violently with such fresh stitches. Behind him, the figure darted out and shut the door, but Todoroki barely registered it, choosing instead to card a hand through his friend's hair, hoping it might help.

He knew he should feel upset. Devastated at his friend's obvious agony. But he just felt cold. And angry.

Midoriya gasped again, and it sounded painful. A quick glance to the monitor showed him a steady drop in his oxygen stats, so he quickly placed his long, slim fingers around the too-large mask and pushed it back onto his face. Midoriya heaved in a breath gratefully. Todoroki held him a little closer but ever so gently, like he was handling something precious. His friend's hand wound a little tighter into his jumper sleeve.

As much as he admired Midoriya's ability to forgive and move on from any grievances, he didn't share that particular quality. As much warmth as Midoriya brought to him which had started to thaw his frosty disposition, a shadowy, only partially hidden part of him remained ice cold – colder than maybe even some of Bakugou's more hostile personality traits.

He couldn't forgive the person who had reduced his friend to this.

The door opened again. The figure had returned, obviously having alerted someone that they needed to come and help. Todoroki turned his head, his eyes latching onto the person still silent behind him, taking in the chaos as if he were watching from behind a glass window.

"For what it's worth," he growled through gritted teeth over Midoriya's head, "I think she deserved everything she got."



Bakugou said nothing. Nothing about his demeanour implied he had even heard Todoroki's frigid words and fiery tone. He simply stared at Midoriya dispassionately, as if he couldn't quite understand what he was seeing.

Two medical professionals – presumably a doctor and a nurse hurried into the room as he stared behind him and the spell was broken as he turned his head back to lower his friend back onto the bed so he could be more easily accessed. As he backed away, Bakugou was already gone.

His attention was pulled back to the adults in the room – the nurse had just finished injecting something into an I.V. line and finally, *finally*, the noises stopped as Midoriya began to still and sink into his mattress.

“Is he alright?” Todoroki demanded as soon as the doctor looked over in his direction.

“What happened?” The man answered his question with a question which ruffled Todoroki's feathers a little.

“He woke up and dry-heaved for a bit – it seemed to hurt.” He replied very simply, his tone and expression tiptoeing the border between directness and passive aggressiveness in his impatience for a response to his question.

The doctor nodded, looking reassuringly unsurprised. “He'll be fine – nothing's torn. It's not unusual for anaesthesia, especially on top of burst eardrums, to cause nausea; it's just unfortunate it's happened to someone with a chest injury.” He looked sympathetic, “I'm not surprised it hurt. We've given him some anti-emetics and the next

round of Quirk healing will focus on fixing up his ears so this doesn't happen again."

Unthinkingly, Todoroki rubbed away the tear tracks and sweat marring his friend's face, again with his cooler hand.

Yes. As far as he was concerned, that villain got everything they deserved, no matter what the media and protestors said.

## Chapter End Notes

Uh oh, spaghetti-o.

I don't know if Todoroki is a bit off here - I find his character quite interesting. I interpret his aloofness and coldness to be partly down to his upbringing and lack of social skills/experience, but also partly because that's just part of his personality - I think he can be cold for lack of a better word, rather than completely socially clueless and inept. Horikoshi also describes him as being quite rude, which I didn't really go too into in this chapter. On the other hand, he does have an anger and a stubbornness, particularly towards authority, that I think runs deeper than Bakugou's angry traits & temper tantrums as they come from another place entirely. Despite all of this, he's very kind and caring towards those he believes deserves it, his mother being a good example in canon. I hope that comes across in this chapter and beyond and he doesn't just come across as a little OOC!

Please let me know if you have any suggestions/feedback - thank you so much for taking the time to read :)

# Chapter 3

## Chapter Notes

Just a reminder to mind the tags :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

*“The victim in question, Bushida Asumi, was described by her family and supporters as a misunderstood...”*

Flip.

*“Questions are being raised about the decisions made by U.A. to allow a student with an allegedly violent track record...”*

Flip.

*“ARE YOU READY TO PLAY...”*

Flip.

*“Protests are being held outside the Provisional Hero Public Safety Commission offices and the campus of U.A. high school for the third day runn...”*

“This is some bullshit,” Jirou commented drily, not looking up from her phone where she was sat cross-legged on the couch, “Turn that garbage off, Kaminari.”

Kaminari didn't look away from the screen, though he did turn the volume down a little, nibbling on his phone charger anxiously, "It's not sounding good."

"It's all gossip – something else'll happen soon and they'll get bored. They always do."

"Have you heard anything else from Kirishima?" Sero asked, long legs tucked under his chin from his corner of the sofa, "I had to hide my phone so I'd stop looking at the news."

"Nope. Not since he told us they were on their way back."

"They're coming here?" Uraraka commented with a look of surprise from where she was perched on one of the dining chairs next to Tsuyu, her own phone cradled in her hands, "Is that a great idea? There are so many protesters outside – is that really fair to Bakugou?"

"I suppose it's that or let them find out his home address and they harass him there," Tsuyu pointed out, a finger resting thoughtfully on her chin, "At least here, they can stop the press from getting too close to the dorm, especially while classes are cancelled."

"Have you heard much about Midoriya?" Ashido asked with a sympathetic look on her face.

Uraraka looked back at her phone sadly and squeezed it with both hands, "Not really. At least Todoroki and Iida are with him – the last I heard he was doing okay though."

“Well, that’s some good news at least.” Jirou commented, finally looking up.

There was a companionable pause, broken only by the muted sound of the reporter on the news.

\*\*\*

“You need to be aware of something before we leave.”

Aizawa appeared like a shadow in twilight and if Katsuki had had any energy left in him whatsoever, it might have made him jerk in surprise. As it was, he continued listlessly packing his shoulder bag, not acknowledging the company in the room whatsoever.

“Do I need to leave?” Kirishima asked from where he was sat scrolling through his charging up phone, waiting for Katsuki to finish.

“No,” Aizawa replied shortly, “You should hear this too.”

Kirishima put his phone down at his teacher’s tone, apparently sensing its gravity. Katsuki continued to robotically fold away surviving bits of costume and smaller items like his own phone charger, headphones and other things that had made their way into his hospital room.

“You need to understand the significance of what’s happened here.”

Katsuki felt his insides twist, though he gave no external indication of his feelings. Was he that much of an evil bastard that his own teacher

didn't think he realised the weight of taking someone's life? He wrapped his charger wire around the plug and tucked it into a zipped partition of his bag.

If Aizawa had any idea of what Bakugou was thinking, he didn't let on.

"This is a small town – the local media was always going to make a big deal of such a destructive attack. What makes it worse for you is that someone was killed."

Kirishima flinched. Katsuki didn't respond.

Aizawa fished his phone out of his pocket and showed an open tab to both boys. Katsuki gave it a brief glimpse, before turning back to his bag. Kirishima, seeing that Bakugou wasn't going to read it, took it instead and skimmed through it, his face growing grimmer by the second.

"It turns out the villain was a missing person – her parents had been looking for her. One day, she dropped her children off at their home and never returned. The general thought is that she was in too deep into drugs and maybe gambling. She owed money so she left to go and make it, which was when you all ran into her at the bank."

"... she had kids?" it was spoken so quietly and with so little movement that it took Aizawa a second to acknowledge that Bakugou had spoken.

"Yes. I'm telling you this now before you read it. Two daughters – three and five."

Bakugou swallowed but made no other comment, placing his fists either side of the bag on his bed and leaning his weight on them, head bowed.

Aizawa took this as his cue to continue.

“Pretty much immediately, advocacy groups have *run* with this. There are some people, as you know, who disagree with heroes getting involved in crime – they think it needs to be left to the police. This is the perfect opportunity to prove their point.” Aizawa sniffed, his detestation of the media ever apparent, “The media are simply there to fuel it for as long as possible to sell their rags.”

“They’re painting her out to be some perfect, misunderstood mother who was pretty much murdered in cold blood.” Kirishima added, voice shaking with well-suppressed, uncharacteristic rage. “This is complete bu-“ he cut himself off with an exasperated huff, “They’re *lying*. She *hurt* people. Look at what she did to Midoriya!”

Aizawa waved him off with a single gesture of his hand, “I know that, kid, and so do they but the truth doesn’t sell papers.”

Kirishima sat back with a thump and a sigh.

“At the end of the day, you have an... unfortunate set of circumstances. A young mother who has gone off the rails – arguably failed by society – which has led her to resort to crime to make ends meet. A tragedy of course. The fact that she was killed by a Hero is the perfect springboard for these kinds of groups to protest against pro-Heroism, or how the state takes care of vulnerable citizens... it’s endless. You’re just unlucky enough to be caught in the crossfire.”

Bakugou still didn’t move.

“Uh, sir...” Kirishima interrupted hesitantly, “They’re bringing up the Sports Festival from first year again.”

Aizawa sighed and ran a hand across his face, betraying his stress and tiredness for the first time since he had entered the room, “Yes. They are.”

Bakugou’s fists tightened.

“U.A. were in the wrong to broadcast that medal ceremony.” Aizawa said shortly. “It’s not helping things now.”

It was clear, without him explicitly saying, that the media were intent on portraying Bakugou as some out of control, blood-thirsty lunatic who had murdered a poor young woman instead of helping her as a victim and U.A. as an irresponsible institution that had not only taught him to become a lethal weapon, but who also failed to reign in his sadistic and violent tendencies, even celebrating them like during the Sports Festival.

Kirishima opened his mouth, presumably to jump in to defend his friend but Bakugou cut him off.

“Let them say what they want.” He said gruffly, “At the end of the day, they’re not wrong. She *was* a victim – Deku saw it right away and tried to help her. And even if I aimed at her feet, I still missed. She died because everyone failed her, including me.” He violently zipped his bag up and hoisted it onto his shoulder. “I deserve everything that’s coming.”

He left the room without looking back at the other occupants. Aizawa



sighed before following quickly behind him, whilst Kirishima grabbed his and Aizawa's phone and the charger still in the wall and hurried to catch up.

He found them by the nurse's station, discharge documents in hand, Bakugou already starting to stalk towards the exit. Aizawa paused him with a hand on his shoulder, "Bakugou."

Bakugou obediently stopped, staring straight ahead, "Can we go now?"

Aizawa looked at him and apparently chose his battles wisely, "Sure." He sighed wearily.

"Are you coming with us, sir?" Kirishima asked to break the slightly awkward silence that had fallen between them, "Or are you staying with Midoriya?"

"All Might arrived a few hours ago to swap with me. I want to make sure you're dropped off at campus without any issues – your luggage from your apartment has been packed for you and is already in the car."

They silently made their way to the car park, Kirishima and Bakugou slipping into the backseat, whilst Aizawa got in front. They were about a third of the way back before the silence was finally broken.

"What was her name?"

Aizawa's eyes studied him in the rear-view mirror. Kirishima shifted anxiously next to him.

“Bushida Asumi.”

That was the first time Katsuki saw her face again, hidden just out of sight as he caught his own eyes in the rear-view mirror.

\*\*\*

“You’re back! It’s so good to see you! We made – Bakugou?”

Ashido was left standing in the middle of the common room, holding a spatula in mid-air, as Bakugou swept straight past the rest of the class and headed straight for the stairs without a word.

Kirishima winced.

“Not a good time then?” Ashido asked after a pregnant pause.

“Maybe not.”

Another pause.

“Oh well!” Ashido eventually chirped, a little too optimistically, “We’ll just save him some in a bento. He can have it later if he wants.”

Kirishima tore his worried eyes away from the staircase that Bakugou had practically flown up in order to greet his friends.

“What have you guys made? It smells great.”

“A bit of this, a bit of that; come and grab some!” She pulled him into a tight, quick hug. “It’s good to see you both.”

Kaminari made his way over, balancing his own bowl in one hand and chopsticks in the other. “It’s been weird without everyone here, man. How’s it been?”

Kirishima found his eyes wandering back to the stairs again, “... I mean, it’s not been great.”

“Did you see Deku before you left?” Uraraka piped up, looking hopeful.

“I didn’t get a chance to right before we left,” Kirishima replied honestly, “But I did last night. He was sleeping but he looked a lot better - I think he’ll be home soon.”

Uraraka genuinely beamed, before blushing and nodding her head, “That’s amazing news!”

The front door opened again, and everyone turned to see Aizawa entering, dropping his keys into his pocket with a jingle.

“Are you hungry?” Jirou asked in greeting, gesturing behind her, “we made way too much food. There’s plenty if you want some.”

“No, thank you. I do need you all to listen up for a minute though.”

No one could command a room’s attention so effectively and immediately as Aizawa Shouta.

“I’m sorry I’ve not been here. I trust Present Mic has been round to speak to you about what’s going on?”

The class nodded.

“I want you to hear this from me. The media presence outside is intense and it’s not likely to die down for a while. Everyone is back from their work studies with the obvious exception of Midoriya, Iida and Todoroki – I hope it goes without saying that none of you are permitted to speak to any journalists about anything that’s been going on.”

“Is it true that someone has been killed?” Tokoyami asked from his shadowy corner of the room where he had been sitting with Shouji and Kouda.

“Yes.” He let that information sink in. “Take this as a lesson – in Heroics, mistakes happen. Accidents happen. You need to be prepared to deal with the fallout from things like this because it could have happened and could still happen to any one of you in training or when working as pros.”

The students sat silently as they let Aizawa’s words settle.

“Is there anything we can do to help?” Momo eventually, tentatively asked.

Aizawa softened slightly, as much as he was physically capable of doing. “Not right now. This is obviously difficult for Bakugou– you need to give him some space. Let him come to you. We’ll do what we can as a school to support him and all of you.”

Everyone nodded their understanding.

“Try to get some rest. Look after each other and stay off the news sites.”

Jirou looked pointedly at Kaminari who gave her a slightly offended look.

With that, Aizawa turned back the way he came, closing the door behind him.

On the first-floor landing, Katsuki turned on his heel and silently stalked up the remaining stairs to his bedroom, locking the door firmly behind him with a...

*Snap.*

Izuku’s eyes wrenched open at the sound of the door clicking with the exaggerated sound of someone trying to close it quietly, but ultimately making more noise than if they had just shut it in one swoop.

“Sorry,” All Might’s skeletal face winced as he dropped his palm from the handle, “Didn’t mean to wake you.”

Izuku let out a sigh he hadn't realised had jumped to his lungs and ended on a small cough, "No, it's fine." He mumbled sleepily, rubbing his eyes. "I'm getting pretty tired of... being tired."

All Might chuckled and sat down next to his student, dropping a tote bag between his feet on the floor. The head of the bed had been raised to ease the pressure on his still-healing chest and lungs, but he had been upgraded from an oxygen mask to a nasal canula after a visit from a Doctor with a healing Quirk that morning. Small wins- he would take what he could get. He slumped a little gracelessly on the pillows behind him, messy hair spread out on the sheets as he craned his neck to face his mentor.

"Did Todoroki and Iida go home yet?"

"No," All Might sighed, passing him a cup of water which Izuku forced himself to not immediately drain; his throat was constantly dry, "I thought I'd almost managed to convince Iida to go back and make sure the rest of the class were in order, but as soon as they found out classes were cancelled, they were back to absolutely refusing to leave without you." he sounded amused as he smiled fondly at his successor, "You've got some very good friends, my boy."

Izuku flushed and smiled shyly, "Yeah. I'm super lucky." He agreed, before screwing up his nose in confusion, "Wait, classes are cancelled?"

All Might's face stiffened in the way it did whenever he revealed information that Aizawa had probably, definitely told him *not* to share with his student under pain of death, but it passed so quickly, Izuku wasn't entirely sure he hadn't imagined it in his tired haze. "It's nothing to worry about," All Might settled on after a second's hesitation, "There was... a little bit of media attention over the fight – small town you know? Nezu thought it'd be best to wait for it to die

down a bit before we open up the campus as usual.”

Izuku blinked tiredly at him and cleared his throat. It didn't quite make sense, but his exhausted brain couldn't quite work out why. It seemed like a story with a lot of holes but trying to make his normally sharp mind process this and work out what wasn't quite sitting instinctually right with him as too much to ask right now, so he just accepted it with a nod.

“Right.”

He coughed again, and gently rubbed his chest.

All Might frowned and took his empty cup to refill it. Izuku took it gratefully and sipped at it.

“Can I go home soon?”

“Home home? To your mom?”

Izuku smiled wistfully, “That would be nice. She called earlier threatening to get an early flight home, but I think I talked her down. I can't wait to be back at the dorms with everyone though.”

“Your mother's travelling?”

“She's overseas, visiting my dad.” He shifted uncomfortably, “she'd have come home either way but,” he grimaced and rolled his back, “but she's back in a few days anyway. She wouldn't be able to afford

such a last-minute ticket back – I wouldn't do that to her."

All Might's mouth tightened into a worried line, "If you want her here, kid, we can arrange something."

Izuku coughed, grimacing as it pulled on his throat, pulled his blankets up to his chin and stiffly knocked himself onto his side in an attempt to get comfortable. He coughed again, pausing when he felt a large, cool hand on his forehead.

"You're feeling very warm, my boy."

Izuku flicked his head subtly. All Might got the hint and removed his hand, making a note to inform someone outside quickly if they didn't come in on their rounds soon.

"Have you seen Kacchan?" he asked, looking hopeful.

All Might rubbed his chin, "No. Aizawa has taken him and Kirishima back to the dorms," at Izuku's slightly crestfallen look, he quickly added, "He did come to see you... no he really did. He never caught you when you were awake though."

"Oh," Izuku sounded disappointed so All Might took this as the perfect opportunity to reach down to the cloth tote bag at his feet, plopping it gently on Izuku's lap.

"A gift from young Uraraka – she wanted me to bring this to you."



Izuku's face immediately brightened into a smile, and he shoved his cup to the table at the side of his bed.

"Hey, my notebooks!"

All Might chuckled, "She thought you might be getting bored."

"And my Switch, my pyjamas... and... oh..." his face went pink as he pulled out the hoodie that had been folded neatly and tucked away under his pyjama top, "My... My All Might hoodie."

All Might smiled and craned his neck round to peer at it, "Aw, is that based on my Silver Age costume?"

Izuku squeaked and stuffed it back into the bag, cheeks reddening further, "I-I-uh..."

All Might gave him another fond chuckle and ruffle of his hair, "You don't need to be so embarrassed," he reassured with a gentle smile, "It's truly an honour – I should be blushing, not you."

All Might was looking at him so kindly and with such genuine affection that he couldn't help but smile back, a soft grin breaking through his bashfulness before the moment was ruined by another cough, a little more strenuous this time. It took a couple of tries to dislodge whatever was irritating his lungs as he hid his sputtering into a fist.

All Might had gripped his shoulder at some point, taking the bag out of his free hand and one-handedly draping it on the seat next to him. Izuku found himself gasping to catch his breath, a small ache starting

near his heart.

“S-Sorry,” he forced out once he had his breath back, “Sorry. I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I felt fine this morning – much better than earlier.”

All Might continued to keep his hand on his shoulder protectively and curled his fingers a little at Izuku’s faintly self-deprecating tone, “You did do a bit of a number on your lungs,” he said, a little carefully, “They could just be a bit irritated.”

“Yeah.” Izuku cleared his throat again weakly, “Maybe.”

“Let me get someone to come and check.” All Might replied, putting his hands on his knees ready to stand.

Izuku nodded, somewhat distractedly, as he twisted a little on the mattress, trying (and failing) to get comfortable. His muscles were starting to ache with a little more ferocity.

He just wanted to go back to the dorms with his friends.

And with Kacchan.

His chest tugged in a way that had nothing to do with the building coughs as the sight of Kacchan staring completely motionless at the villain’s body flashed across his mind’s eye.

He hoped he was alright.

Katsuki sat cross-legged in the middle of his bed, the early twilight casting dark shadows into his room. His leg twitched slightly and started to bounce, making his whole body jitter as the mattress vibrated with the movement.

“...dammit...”

He pressed his exhausted eyes into the palms of his hands, his fingers screwed up and leaving small, crescent-shaped dents in his skin as his nails dug in. He embraced the sharp scratch; it distracted him a little.

The villain stood limply in the darkest corner of his room... *no, his mind... it was all in his mind...* staring at him with her glossed over black eyes, her head caved in at the back and drip, drip, dripping blood onto the floor. Her head was awkwardly tilted to one side, as if he were a particularly unusual piece of artwork.

“Dammit.”

Her mouth dropped open, swaying on its hinges as she began to wail. Not a super-powered, Trigger-bolstered cry, but a genuine howl of agony and suffering as she wept black tears.

“*Why didn't you help me?*” she whispered, her voice ethereal and wispy.

“Dammit, go away.” he snarled firmly, rationally well aware that he was talking to an empty corner. His guilt decided to continue baiting him however, and the woman staggered forward, limping awkwardly

and horrifically as she dragged her body closer and closer, her tears and blood glinting in the apathetic moonlight.

She croaked and held out an arm that looked like it was starting to fall out of its socket. She looked like she was disintegrating.

“*Help me!*” she shrieked and Katsuki instinctively shoved himself backwards, brandishing his palm.

“Get away, dammit!”

There was a knock at the door, startling him into throwing a small explosion directly through the apparition where it snuffed out with a pathetic *whack* against the door that was responsible for the sound that had spooked him in the first place.

He took a second to catch his breath and stare around the room. She had vanished again.

*Fucking hell, was this what finally did it? Was he actually losing his mind?*

The door handle started to turn, blocked by the lock that Katsuki had turned firmly as soon as he entered his room, barring the spectre out in the hallway. The woman... *Bushida...* *Asumi...* had simply re-appeared directly behind him as he was barricading the door, two slim and slimy arms seductively draping themselves over his shoulder, small hands brushing his chest.

He shuddered.

“Bakugou... buddy... it’s me. Are you ok?”

Kirishima.

Katsuki groaned and tipped his head back in despair, “What do you want, Hair-For-Brains?”

“Dude, you just tried to nuke your door.”

“Only cos you scared the *shit* out of me, you idiot.”

There was a concerned pause on the other side, but no footsteps indicating Kirishima was leaving. Bakugou let out another louder and far more dramatic groan.

“*Fiiiiine*, but you’re sleeping in your own room tonight.”

“If you say so, dude.”

It wasn’t something that happened often, but a lot had happened over the last year and a half. The war had taken a toll on all of them, some more than others, and it wasn’t unusual for students to wind up on each other’s floors at odd hours of the morning after a nightmare or just so they weren’t lying awake on their own in the dark, their minds racing with memories and dreaded *what-ifs*?

Kirishima hadn’t been impervious to this and Katsuki, whilst he would deny it vehemently, did actually care (he guessed) about Kirishima’s emotional wellbeing. If all it took to keep his friend happy was a

couple of nights on his floor, then who was he to question it?

And it totally was just for Kirishima's sake. He got no comfort out of it whatsoever. Nope. Everything was fine.

Katsuki shuffled over to his door. The minute the lock clicked again, Kirishima was shoving his door open, as if he didn't trust Katsuki not to immediately barricade the door again which... in all honesty, was fair enough.

There he stood in all his red-headed, bed-ready glory, hair poker-straight and down, pushed back with his white bandana to match his pyjama shorts and t-shirt. Katsuki found the sight annoyingly reassuring, like it settled his soul or something.

Gross.

"What's going on, man?"

Katsuki moved back into his room, letting Kirishima come in properly.

"Why are you sat here in the dark? Did you have a nightmare?"

Katsuki prickled a little, "Why are you asking so many stupid questions?"

Kirishima sat himself on his bed without an invite which was *rude* in Katsuki's opinion and turned on the bedside lamp, which was basically unforgivable at this point.

“It’s been a shit day, man.” Kirishima uncharacteristically swore which made Katsuki pause in his internal ranting and sit down next to him to stop himself from stress-pacing. “It’s alright if you’re not ok.”

Katsuki felt irritation starting to burn at his skin, making him feel the need to either run a mile or blow something up...

*“Already want to murder someone else, do you?”* sniped the woman from the corner, a grotesque grin growing on her face, *“who’s next? Your friend?”*

Katsuki agitatedly gripped his duvet in his fists and tried to ignore her.

“Is there anything I can do?”

*“Look at you, angry little boy.”* The woman... *Asumi...* practically purred. He jumped as her voice suddenly appeared behind him, startlingly close to his ear, *“He only wants to help and I can feeeeeeel you losing your temper with him.”*

Shut up... shut up... shut up...

*“You don’t deserve him, you know.”* She stated sagely, crawling close to Kirishima and peering at his face with her soulless eyes. Bakugou felt sick at the sight and fought the urge to shove her away from his friend.

“Even if it’s just grabbing you some food, or some tea...”

*“Are you going to do the same to him as you did to me?”* she fell back onto her back, writhing around like a tortured cat. Her hair was matted with blood but left no stain on the duvet. She gasped and sat up as if a sudden thought had occurred to her, *“Or to Deku?”*

Shut up... shut up... shut up...

She squealed with delight, *“Ooh, ooh, ooh!”* she giggled, *“Are you going to tell him to kill himself too? Save yourself the job?”*

*“Or we could just play some video games or something?”*

Asumi clapped her twisted hands like an excited toddler, *“Or maybe you could just blast a hole in the back of his head when his back is turned to you!”* her face suddenly turned even more terrible, her voice echoing and furious as she screeched, *“Like a coward!”*

Shut up... shut up... shut up...

*“Bakugou?”*

She seemed to grow larger and larger, dominating his space and crowding him unbearably, practically sitting in his lap. *“Coward! Coward! Coward!”*

*“Bakugou?”*



**“ Shut the fuck up . ”**

He snapped his mouth shut as he realised that had been out loud. Kirishima physically recoiled, looking hurt. Asumi clapped a hand over her mouth like a small child watching another child do something naughty and giggled; an awful, wretched, haunting sound. She had shrunk back to her usual, petite self in the blink of an eye.

“Wait... not you...” he tried to explain through gritted teeth. This probably didn’t endear him to his friend any more than basically screaming at him to shut up had.

“No, it’s alright man.” Kirishima started to get up a little hesitantly as if any sudden movements would get him blasted.

*No.*

“You’re tired, I’ll leave you to it.”

*Please, don’t leave me.*

“Sorry, it was selfish... I shoulda known you wanted some space, right?” he rubbed the back of his neck, a clear indication he was uncomfortable – it wasn’t a habit Katsuki saw in their relationship all that much anymore, he realised with a pang. “My bad. Text me if you need anything, okay?”

“Eijirou...” Katsuki felt paralysed, uncharacteristically desperate to reach out and stop Kirishima from leaving, but a combination of pride, self-disgust and Asumi’s arms stopped him from reaching out.

Kirishima reached the door.

“Have a good night, Bakugou.”

The door swung shut.

Katsuki sat, the sound of his own breaths hanging sickly in the air as he listened to Kirishima’s soft footsteps move away to his own front door. The soft, wooden thud of his bedroom door closing, and the unusual sound of the metallic click of his lock engaging seemed to completely sever their companionship for the evening with a sickening finality.

Bakugou was on his own again.

Since when did that bother him?

Asumi shifted behind him to roll herself off the mattress, and it unsettled him more than it should have that his bed didn’t move with her. It unsettled him more than it should have because he *knew* she wasn’t real. She wasn’t there. She was just the messenger – the voice of his guilt. His punishment.

And that’s what made her presence all the more terrifying.

She crawled back to her corner, her limbs all askew as she dragged herself with a sickening shuffling sound as she scraped against the carpet.

*“Sweet dreams.”* She croaked sweetly and dissolved into the carpet.

Katuski stared dully at where she had melted.

He deserved all of this.

## Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and thank you so much for the kudos and feedback so far! Have a lovely day :)

# Chapter 4

## Chapter Notes

Slightly shorter chapter today - just how it worked out! Please enjoy :)

As always, thank you so much for your kudos and feedback, you have no idea how much it's appreciated!

“Deku’s sick.”

Was the first thing that greeted him as he shuffled downstairs, making as little noise as possible.

Well, good fucking morning to you too, Roundface.

Though, technically, it wasn’t aimed at him. It was a general update to the room, like some sort of Deku-focused news station. The effect was immediate though.

“What happened?” Hagakure piped up from disturbingly close to him. He actually jumped at the sound. Fucking invisible bitch sneaking up on him. “I thought he was getting better?”

Her voice was concerned, and it reflected the look on everyone’s faces except his own, which he schooled into an expression of irritated neutrality. It wasn’t hard. He was exhausted – he hadn’t slept maybe more than a broken hour. Deku was pissing him off when he wasn’t even here which was impressive. He was *supposed* to be getting better. That was why he had left when he did. Stupid nerd. And fucking Invisible Girl had managed to catch him off-guard. Goddamn. He had literally only been in the room for around five seconds and he was

already ready to blast everyone to – no. No. Stop thinking that. Villain.

“Todoroki just texted,” Uraraka continued, a little desperately, “I mean, it was *Todoroki* so he’s literally just said ‘*Midoriya’s sick*’ and nothing else. I’m messaging Iida instead for more information.”

Great, now fucking Half n’ Half was pissing him off long distance too.

Good work everyone.

Asumi peered at him from behind a pillar as he felt his irritation rise like a wave. It froze over as he caught her eye. When he looked back at her again, she had vanished. He blinked.

Ever predictable and reliable, Iida responded almost immediately and with the great amount of detail the rest of the class were craving. Uraraka read it out verbatim.

*“Midoriya developed a fever last night – this morning, it’s much worse, he’s coughing, he can’t sleep. The doctors have said it’s an infection. It could be from the blade, from surgery, from dirt on the cloak used to stop the bleeding when initial first aid was administered... he could have already just have had the beginnings of a cold and his immune system is too weak from the stress to fight it off. Either way, it’s looking like pneumonia.”*

The class silently let the information wash over them, as Uraraka’s phone pinged again. It was a second message from Iida. She dutifully read it out again, her eyes shining.

*“They can’t use a healing Quirk atm – he’s too exhausted from the last few rounds of healing so they’ve got him on oxygen and antibiotics. It might*

*take a bit longer, but they're confident he'll be fine eventually. Todoroki and I will be staying a little longer with him and All Might so he won't be alone."*

Iida, a keen fan of correct spelling and grammar at all times, betrayed a concern that was otherwise well-hidden behind his professional and formal messaging style. 'atm'. Glasses was clearly worried and typing quickly. Speaking of worried...

"Has anyone told Auntie?"

It was the first time he had spoken to his classmates for almost a week. Uraraka jumped and whipped her head over her shoulder to acknowledge him, not realising he was there. She nodded at him and tapped out the question to Iida. It pinged again a few seconds later.

"All Might has – the earliest flight she could get back is not for a couple of days." She winced. "She must be beside herself."

"Is his dad coming too?"

Uraraka opened her mouth, then shut it again with uncertainty. She glanced back at her phone, as if she might have just missed that part of the message.

"Uh. He didn't say."

Katsuki scoffed, "Pft. Figures."

A couple of the others shifted slightly uncomfortable looks between

them before Momo broke the awkward cloud that had sprung over the room with Katsuki's statement.

"Uh. We should send something – flowers, or fruit. Or I could make something if we design it?"

"That's a good idea, Yaomomo," Uraraka replied, looking grateful for the distraction.

"Ooh! I want to help design a present!" Hagakure squealed, her arm clearly waving in the air if her floating t-shirt was anything to go by.

"I'll grab a notebook." Sero offered, jumping off his seat on the sofa and bounding up the stairs, two at a time.

"I'll make him a dope playlist and lend him something to play it on," Jirou hummed thoughtfully, standing up as well to grab her laptop from her room, taking the stairs with a lot more poise and maturity than the boy before her.

Katsuki watched the hurricane of productivity and noise around him, again feeling like he was trapped on the wrong side of the glass. It all just didn't quite make sense to him, and he struggled to process what was happening. All that was running through his mind was a confusing jumble of *Deku*, *Kirishima*, *Asumi*, *villain*, *murderer*, "dieeee", *villain*, *villain*, *villain*...

"Bakugou?"

Katsuki cursed and curled his hands into fists to avoid accidentally blasting someone else's head off. Uraraka stood in front of him, a little

apprehensively.

She looked like she was about to ask if he was alright, which would have been a question that she would have regretted. However, he underestimated her intelligence... again. That wasn't what she came to ask.

"Would you like me to send something from both of us?" she asked gently, but not condescendingly. As if she knew how much he would struggle to put his own brand of caring on a physical gift or into words on some superficial card. As if she knew how much he really did want to show Deku that he *did* care without making it too obvious that he *did* care. As if she knew he still had *no fucking clue what he was doing* when it came to being his... friend. His rival always, but also his... friend.

He stared at her for a second, processing her words before nodding once without a word.

She smiled.

"That'll mean a lot to him." She said simply, before walking away to join the hoard of students excited to finally be able to do something that might help their friend.

Katsuki blinked again.

Kirishima walked past him without saying anything, eager to join the others.

It wasn't hostile, but it was very clearly giving him the space he



thought he wanted.

Once again, the ball was in his court and he *didn't fucking want the ball*.

Screw this. He was hitting the gym while the extras were distracted and then going back to bed.

\*\*\*

Izuku felt like he was four years old again: Quirkless and afraid of the dark, even with the soft light from his All Might nightlight plugged in the far corner of his bedroom, chasing the worst of the shadows away.

He would wriggle down the bed as much as he could without his toes poking out (where a ghostie could grab them and drag him off of his mattress) and cover his head with his hero-themed duvet. The good news was that this way, the ghosties couldn't see him and he could pretend they didn't exist, floating around his bedroom. The bad news was that it made him hot, sweaty, and out of breath.

Eventually, he would have to gather all of his courage and ask the ghosties very politely to please leave now that they've had their fun, that it was his turn to use his bedroom now. He would wait a couple of seconds before popping his little, sweaty face out from its hiding place and breathing in the fresh air.

Sure enough, the ghosties had cordially and reasonably moved on and he could fall asleep... much later than his mother would have cared for of course, but comfortable, cool, and easily breathing.

Unfortunately, this time, there was no blanket to shove away, no matter how hard he tried and the ghosties wouldn't get the hint and give him his turn in his bedroom.

They kept pulling the blanket back over him, blocking his breathing. They held his hands down so he couldn't move or hide. They whispered to him things he couldn't understand. They also did keep something cool on his face though, so Izuku could begrudgingly appreciate them for that.

The worst part was the fact that he *just could not catch his breath*. It was like trying to breathe through a thick duvet all over again, with no reprieve.

"You need to keep this on," a kind voice said from above him. Izuku froze from trying to bat away the sheet covering his mouth and nose and blocking his air supply. That was remarkably clear and coherent for a ghost. Wait. That sounded an awful lot like Iida.

Panic shot through him.

"Iida!" he hoarsely called out, wrenching his eyes open. He looked around wildly for him. Iida swam into view, his eyebrows pinched in concern.

"I'm here, Midoriya."

He squeezed the hand he had removed from his face.

"Iida!" he repeated, staring up at his friend in alarm, "Iida... are you... are you dead?"

Iida looked a little alarmed, but calmly grabbed the other hand that rose to his face to try and move the offending object from his mouth, “No, Midoriya. I’m quite well.”

“Oh.” Izuku panted at him, confused for a moment. He frowned, chest heaving. “Wait... am I dead?”

Iida looked all the more concerned, “No.” he said again softly. “No. We’re taking care of you. Just relax.”

“Am *I* the ghost?”

Iida looked really quite worried now. He released one hand and reached out of sight. Izuku tried to follow but couldn’t quite twist his neck that far. His hand returned into his line of sight a second later, and coolness spread across his forehead, “What are you seeing, my friend?” It sounded like a rhetorical question, but Izuku didn’t really believe in rhetorical questions.

“Ghosties.” He whispered very seriously. “I can’t breathe.”

He felt the hand in his tighten again, “You can. I promise you, you can. You just need to...” his hand left his forehead and went back to his other wandering fingers to push them back down to the bed, “You just need to leave the mask on.”

Izuku frowned. “... Mask...?” he whispered in confusion.

He tried to move his hand again to feel and this time, Iida relented,

guiding his fingers to his face gently. It wasn't a duvet over his face; it was hard and round and, he realised belatedly, blowing air over his mouth and nose. He dropped his hand back down willingly, without prompting.

"Oh." He said simply.

Iida's now-free hand went back to making his face cool which was very nice of him.

Izuku really *did* have good friends.

He smiled and couldn't help releasing a little giggle.

Iida smiled back as if he couldn't help himself, "What is it?"

Izuku's smile widened into a bright grin, "... love you, Iida." He could hear himself slurring. Whoops, he was falling asleep. "You're a really good friend. I'm so... lucky...."

He could feel himself trailing off as his eyelids started to become heavy.

Iida huffed an amused sound, despite the serious look he had on his face all the way through their interaction. "I'm very lucky too."

... was the last thing he heard before the room went dark again.

*The road was sideways.*

*A blurry Kacchan was in the distance, defying gravity and all other elements of physics, darting around in the air with a flash and a muffled boom! as he scrapped with the Trigger-high villain.*

*Izuku became acutely aware of his cheek scraping against the asphalt as his eyes tried to follow the scrap. It forced his neck into impossible and painful contortions however, so he focused on rolling into a more sustainable position on his back.*

*Not the best idea he had ever had, it turned out.*

*He realised his mistake as he forced himself halfway up onto his forearms before freezing – the pain as it pulled the hole in his chest was blinding. However, momentum made his decision for him and rolled him over his shoulder and onto his back with a thump and a tight groan.*

*His hand shifted in miniscule increments to inspect his torso... what on earth had he done to himself?*

*His hand clearly found the right spot and was instantly coated in thick blood.*

*He swallowed, staring up at the sky, the faint booms and wails from the battle muffled against his damaged eardrums.*

*The stars seemed to swoop in front of him as he screwed a fist over the wound half-heartedly, aware that he needed to put pressure on it to stop the bleeding but unable to force his muscles to push down with anywhere near the force necessary.*

*A particularly massive explosion caught his attention.*

*The silhouette of the woman, hair raised in a halo around her from the shockwave of the blast, looked terribly beautiful against the backdrop of white fire.*

*She dropped along with the blinding light.*

*“K-Ka-“ he started to choke out on a whisper but was stopped again by the agony building with every heartbeat and the unbearable need to choke as something metallic and tangy filled his throat to trickle lazily out of his mouth. He swallowed it back determinedly but couldn’t stop his breaths from coming in thin, too-fast gasps, bordering on hyperventilation. “Ka-“ he tried again but couldn’t get his voice to travel more than a few inches.*

*He listened helplessly, hearing swimming as much as his vision as Kacchan crawled with agonising slowness and roared with frustration. Izuku winced. Bakugou took great pride in his agility and strength – he knew how much it would piss him off that his body would betray him like this.*

*The woman had yet to move and a gnawing horror dawned on Izuku, making the already-existent churning in his stomach ramp up a notch. His breath grew sharper and quicker as he realised what had happened around the same time that Kacchan collapsed onto his forearms at the sight of the blood marinading his gloves and kneepads.*

*Izuku tried to shift to reach him as Kacchan clearly froze in place, staring at the woman with a lax jaw. It scared him, he realised, to see Bakugou*

*like this – it wasn't in his character to freeze when there was a job to be done.*

*He whined, tears leaking involuntarily from his tightened eyes as he realised he couldn't reach him.*

*The painful sounds of Kacchan retching onto the tarmac crashed into his ears clearly, as his hearing suddenly returned, seemingly even more sensitive than before.*

*Oh, God, he couldn't reach him.*

*The realisation seemed to force the remaining adrenaline in his body to surge and he sucked in a deep breath around the cold, stabbing pain in his lung. "Kacchan?"*

*Suddenly, a lot of things made sense. The solution to the puzzle he couldn't figure out earlier slammed into him quicker than his brain could sort into logical pieces.*

*Classes cancelled, no Kacchan, All Might keeping something from him, media focus... the body of a young woman curled up on the cold concrete with only her blood and the mocking stars to keep her company.*

*He gasped in realisation.*

*"Kacchan!"*

*A soft beeping replaced the frozen silence of the alleyway. The*

freezing, hard surface that had been digging uncomfortably into his bones gave way to too soft blankets and a stifling heat.

Todoroki's face filled his vision.

Todoroki blinked at him.

“No.” he said blankly. “I’m Shouto.”

He even briefly moved his surgical mask down beneath his chin, as if his mouth and chin were his most defining features and, without seeing them, Izuku could be forgiven for mistaking his face for Bakugou Katsuki's. He pushed it back up after a second.

Izuku stared at him hazily for a second, languidly blinking as he waited for his brain to catch up.

Todoroki took the stillness as his cue to move a cold hand towards him, small wisps of icy air dancing off his fingers. Izuku tracked it, going a little cross-eyed when it landed on his head. He glanced back at his friend who turned his eyes away a little awkwardly.

“I was asked to help regulate your temperature.” He explained, still not meeting his eyes. Did normal friends do things like this for each other? Touching other people didn't really come as naturally to Shouto as it seemed to Midoriya and his other classmates.

Izuku hummed reassuringly, “S' nice.”



Todoroki didn't seem to have anything to say to that which was reassuringly in character, though he did give a nod of approval. Taking advantage of his improved lucidity compared to the last time he woke up (*why was Iida a floating ghost?*), Izuku could recognise this time around that he was sick. Sweat matted his hair disgustingly, bunching the tangled curls into knots that he just knew would be a nightmare to try and tease out. His cheeks felt flushed, and his chest felt clogged and *painful*. Those observations, combined with random slots of lost time if the calendar next to the bed was anything to go by, made him a little jittery, so it was grounding that Todoroki was as unphased as ever and carried out his assigned task with the same solemn professionalism of a funeral director.

*Don't think about funerals... why is the idea of a funeral adding to his anxiety...?*

The logical conclusions he had come to before he opened his eyes slapped him, rather impolitely, and suddenly he felt *very* awake.

"Kacch-" he started, moving against the hand on his head before the movement and sudden vocalisation caught something cold in his chest awkwardly, and he found himself shooting up and doubling over at the ferocity of the coughing it triggered.

On and on it went, making his head pound and his eyes water. Any breath he could get in simply irritated his chest further, and he curled a limp hand towards his sternum to at least try and hold himself together. Todoroki gently moved the ever-present oxygen mask from his face and let it dangle from his neck, and he could *feelsaliva* and something more... *viscous*... being ejected from his throat. He used his other hand to try and contain it as Todoroki placed a hand on his shoulder and gradually started to coax him backwards.

He started to wordlessly protest between coughs, hoping that the tone of his voice would get across his displeasure at the idea of lying down, but he stopped complaining when he felt the mattress touching his

back far sooner than expected. The head had been raised to an angle where there was less pressure on his chest, but he was still supported by the bedding. He couldn't stop his head from lolling as the fit continued and Todoroki kept a steadying hand on his shoulder to help support him as the force of the coughs jack-knifed him away from the bed a few times.

Finally, it felt like something loosened with a crackle in his chest and he tasted something truly vile in the back of his throat as his chest started to loosen. Todoroki, as neutral as ever, simply handed him a tissue and politely looked away as Izuku hacked into it, unwilling to swallow whatever had come loose in his infected lungs.

He gave a long, deep gasp for breath around the residual ache and revelled in the ability to do so a tiny bit better than he could before, but the pressure remained. Todoroki offered him a small bin to deposit the tissue in, before gesturing at the mask still dangling under Izuku's chin. He pressed it to his mouth and nose, inhaling deeply, trying to slow his breaths.

"Ugh," he finally croaked, flushing a little, "I'm... so sorry."

"Don't apologise." He looked at the screen next to the bed, monitoring his heart rate and oxygen levels, "And maybe stop talking. That number is too low." He added, pointing at the O2 number which was hovering at around 90 but starting to climb steadily as he got his breaths under control.

They sat in a surprisingly companionable silence as Izuku closed his eyes tiredly and focused on breathing steadily, still gripping onto the mask like a comfort blanket. His chest caught and complained with every breath in, and he frowned his discomfort.

"Should I get someone?"

He peered underneath an eyelid to see Shouto staring at him a little intensely.

His eyes drifted shut again.

“No.” He allowed himself a small cough but luckily, it didn’t spiral like before. “No. I’m okay.”

He could practically *feel* Todoroki’s disbelieving, raised eyebrow radiating towards him judgementally.

“Todoroki?” he began, testing his following words on his tongue before saying them aloud. He raised his lids an inch and looked at Todoroki through the corner of his eyes. Seeing that he had his undivided attention, Izuku risked shifting to a more comfortable position on his side, triggering a few shallow coughs. At least he could see who he was speaking to now.

“What is it, Midoriya?” His even tone hadn’t changed the whole time Izuku had been awake. His frozen hand returned to his face.

“Why did Principal Nezu *really* cancel classes?”

Todoroki paused. Then again, with no discernible shift in his inflection asked: “All Might told you.”

It wasn’t really a question.

Todoroki averted his gaze again.

“All Might wasn’t supposed to tell you that.”

Izuku felt a small, unfamiliar flash of irritation. He was uncomfortably warm, in pain and now people were hiding things from him? Why?

“Why?” he voiced outright.

“You’re not well.” If Todoroki had picked up on his temper, he didn’t make it obvious. “He was going to tell you everything once you were better.”

Izuku deflated. He supposed that was fair enough, really. He was still too tired to really argue against it anyway.

“I think I figured it out anyway,” he grumbled tiredly, shifting his head until he was comfortable and placing a hand under the side of his face. Todoroki moved his hand away so he could get comfortable without something blocking his way.

His face lifted with the ghost of a smile, “I’d expect nothing less.” He looked about as close to playful as Todoroki Shouto could get; it was a rare side that only Midoriya and perhaps his sister really were privy to. “What’s your theory?”

“Will you tell me if I’m right?”

“That depends.”

“Depends on what?”

“What’s your theory?”

Izuku sighed grumpily and reached for Todoroki’s hand. Puzzled, he held it out to him. Izuku shook his head. “No, the other one. The cold one.”

Todoroki obliged and Izuku shoved it back over his face unceremoniously, sighing when the temperature of his fingers dropped slowly, giving him time to adjust to the change in temperature.

“Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it.”

Izuku sobered slightly as he gathered his thoughts. They were still slippery, sloshing away in his overheated brain.

“Kacchan killed that girl.”

“He did.” Todoroki confirmed neutrally.

“He didn’t mean to. I saw it – he really didn’t mean to. If nothing else, Kacchan knows more than anyone how much public image can matter, especially after the League of…” he paused to cough. And cough again. He dragged in cool air and waited for his breathing to

regulate itself again.

“Careful.” Todoroki warned, tapping the back of a fingernail on his O2 stats again. “Be efficient in your mumbling this time.”

Izuku gave him a slightly rueful look before *carefully* continuing, being sure to take more pauses for oxygen, which Todoroki seemed to approve of, though his voice really was starting to sound wrecked from how much he had used and abused it since waking.

“Kacchan was taken... by the League. Because they thought he was a villain. He might pretend that... he’s some... *Great Explosion Murder God*.” He said that last part with quote marks from one set of fingers. “But... he wouldn’t go as far as *actually* killing someone.”

He wasn’t too sure who he was trying to convince really.

Todoroki clearly didn’t need any justification, “It wouldn’t make a difference either way to me.” He said bluntly. “You were in danger. I would rather have you both safe and well than you both dead and her locked away.”

Interesting.

He packed that away for later and continued.

“The problem is... the media. Those advocacy groups... for hero reform... social justice groups... I could tell she was scared. Vulnerable. I’m guessing I wasn’t... far off?”

Todoroki indicated his head to show he wasn't far off at all.

“And... she becomes a poster girl. For all of these pushes for change. And the media get their story.” He paused to clear his throat painfully, “Make it seem like Kacchan is only in it... for violence. Power. People start to wonder... how many more in the next generation... of heroes are like that?”

“But, he's... he's still a kid. Still training. So, they look at U.A... who, as far as they're spinning it... have trained a killer. It's not really... about Kacchan... or that girl at all. It's just... an agenda. Wrong place, wrong time... for both of them.”

He swallowed dryly, his speech having drained him of any energy he had regained from sleeping. His muscles down to the bone felt unbearably delicate and his stomach churned with worry. And doubt.

Doubt was a very unfamiliar emotion when it came to Kacchan.

What they were saying about him was wrong... wasn't it? But, she was also a victim who needed saving. They were heroes to protect those in need... right?

The two conflicting sides clashed uncomfortably in his tired brain. He pushed it down and hid the conflict somewhere behind his growing fatigue and sank into mattress in exhaustion.

“Kacchan won't take this well.”

Todoroki huffed, “Bakugou doesn't take anything well.”

“Still,” Izuku wrapped himself up in his blankets further, minding the wires attached to the mask and to his hands, “I’m worried about him.”

“He’s strong. He has U.A. He has Class A, as much as he might pretend he doesn’t want them. Something else will happen and everyone will forget about this soon enough.”

“Hmm. I hope so.”

Todoroki studied him for a long, silent moment. “You should sleep.” He finally concluded. “I kept you talking too long. How are you feeling?”

“Rough.” Izuku whispered honestly.

Todoroki looked mildly sympathetic and moved his cold hand to his shoulder, “You’re forgetting one thing.” He said, very seriously.

“What’s that?”

“Look at what she did to you.”

Izuku blinked. “What does that –” he broke off into a painful cough again, reaching across his chest with the arm under his body to grab the hand Todoroki had on his shoulder for something to hold onto as his chest heaved. Todoroki interlocked their fingers and allowed him to hold tightly as he choked.



Once he had calmed down again, Todoroki continued, not moving his hand.

“She’s not some innocent victim.” He explained, “She hurt you. A hero. A child as well. Once the shock wears off, people will see that and start to change their minds. Bakugou was a hero for saving you.”

“You know,” Izuku rasped, feeling sleep creeping up on him again, “there was a time that... time that would never have left your mouth... even if your life... depended on it.”

Todoroki’s lips jerked, “I can hardly believe it myself. But he’s proven that at least twice now in my eyes. He *is* a hero.”

Izuku’s eyes slipped closed, “Someone might... need to remind *him* of that.”

He drifted away.

# Chapter 5

## Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay!! The chapter has essentially been pulled apart (and split in two) with some edits made in earlier chapters. Basically, this started as a one/two shot (haha) and, therefore, as it grew, it ended up throwing up themes that I hadn't prepared to battle.

I owe A LOT to applecider18 - thank you SO much for your support, ideas and general editing. You really went above and beyond and I can't thank you enough. I'm very lucky!

Please enjoy the chapter and any feedback would be hugely appreciated, especially as an huge amount of work has gone into this by both myself and the amazing applecider18.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## Chapter 5

“You all know why we’re here, I expect.”

A cheerful voice popped up from the folds of Aizawa’s scarf as he slid the board room door shut behind him and took his seat around the large mahogany table. The chair between Snipe and Vlad King remained hauntingly empty.

He averted his eyes.

“Of course,” Vlad King growled, his fangs appearing sharper than usual. “One of Aizawa’s students finally took it too far.”

Aizawa’s remaining eye glowed threateningly as his hair started to

rise. He tensed in his chair, his fists clenched as he glared at the other teacher. “What did you just say?”

Vlad looked distinctly unbothered by Aizawa’s unspoken threat.

“It’s true,” he retorted, his arms folding as he leaned back in his office chair. “Get that media-sized chip off your shoulder for a few seconds, Eraser, and you might see what the rest of us do.”

“And what’s that?” Aizawa practically spat as Nezu hopped from his shoulder and onto the table, watching the argument with neutral interest.

“A failure: of this society and this school – have we forgotten *how* most criminals are made? Maybe us heroes need to start preventing vulnerable people from having to turn to a life of crime in the first place, rather than reactively training our children to become murderers.”

Aizawa felt his nails sink into the palm of his hands; he wouldn’t be surprised if he had made himself bleed.

“Would you rather have a dead student, Vlad?”

“Shouta,” Present Mic’s unusually soft voice warned across the table. He looked pale and conflicted. Aizawa ignored him, feeling an odd mixture of rage and grief fill him, both old and new.

“If Bakugou hadn’t acted, this would be a very different conversation.”

Shirakumo's face floated by in his mind's eye. He knew what that had done to him and Yamada – he couldn't bear the thought of what it might do to his own students if Midoriya had met the same fate.

Nemuri's seat loomed emptier and quieter than ever. Her absence sent a pang of hurt reverberating through his heart. She always knew what to say, always had advice or a trick up her outrageously revealing sleeves. She would know exactly what to do.

"That doesn't make what he did right." Vlad barrelled on, his words smashing Shirakumo and Nemuri's ghostly faces from existence. "Haven't you trained your kids with more dangerous Quirks to think first, fire second?"

"Of course I have," Aizawa snapped. "He's a child. Children make mistakes."

"Then why the hell are we sending children out into the field?"

"How else are they meant to—"

The jovial tone from the rodent on the table clashed jarringly with the building tension in the room: "An excellent question, Vlad, that will no doubt be asked in various forms by many people in the upcoming weeks."

Snipe rested his head on a fist thoughtfully and interrupted before Aizawa could respond.

“Maybe you’re both right,” he interjected. “Maybe we dropped the ball here – we’re working with teenagers, some with incredibly dangerous abilities. We all know Bakugou has impressive control over his Quirk, as seen in last year’s Sports Festival. If this loss of control could happen to *him* out in the field, who’s to say it won’t happen to any of his peers?”

Nezu raised a paw and any response to Snipe died in mid-air as the teachers turned to face him. His smile remained stiffly on his face, though his black eyes were cold.

“I have to say, this debate is a necessary one especially considering the current state of our fledgling society. As a school, we may normally be more limited in the overall influence we have, but these particular circumstances – and the attention they have wrought – changes that.”

“The students are our priority. *Especially* Bakugou,” Aizawa stated, very plainly. “He needs to be protected – he’s my – *our*, responsibility.”

“I don’t disagree with that.”

“Principal Nezu–“

Another paw halted Vlad’s argument in its tracks.

“And neither do I disagree with Vlad King in this instance.”

Aizawa stared at him, unable to hide the slight look of betrayal that curled upon his face. It was rare that he and Nezu weren’t generally

on the same page.

“You think Bakugou’s, what, a murderer? That he shouldn’t have defended Midoriya?”

“I didn’t say that. However, the public is.”

“I don’t give a damn about–”

“You should. Your job is to protect them,” Nezu interrupted firmly, his chipper tone darkening. “How can you do that if what little faith that remains in heroes is compromised?”

He wasn’t wrong. Aizawa closed his mouth and crossed his arms over his scarf.

“Shouta,” Nezu began, not unkindly. “Your devotion to your students is commendable – they need your advocacy now, more than ever – but you cannot let it blind you to reality. Do not forget that you are also a hero, and not just a teacher.

“Vlad, your passion for helping those in need is also commendable, but it cannot be at the expense of someone else who needs our help, *especially* when that person is a child we are supposed to be moulding into a functioning protector of society. Do not forget that you are also a teacher, and not just a hero.

“Perhaps, the answer lies in what a ‘protector’ looks like in a post-War world. Perhaps, it lies in how we train our students and what we train them for. Perhaps, we should consider the age at which we recruit new heroes, or allow them to acquire the permits and licences

necessary to act. There is a fine line between a student learning on the job and a child soldier being used to execute the state's will without question.

"Human nature has always been to exploit or ignore the weak; I know that firsthand. This, however, is the perfect opportunity to change that. To help those in need before they become victims themselves either as 'villains,' or as those who suffer at the hands of heroes."

"We've always been so concerned about our students being able to defend themselves," Vlad grunted with a nod, "maybe it's time we recognise when they become a threat to the very people they should be saving."

"By throwing Bakugou to the wolves?" Aizawa grimaced tiredly, having lost the bite behind his words.

"Why, not at all." The rodent placated.

"These groups are calling for the kid to be arrested, Nezu," Present Mic popped up again, looking very uncomfortable. "They want him charged for murder."

Nezu shook his head, "No, they want justice. They want change. We just don't know what that justice should look like yet."

"And just how will that be determined?" Vlad grumbled, far more subdued than he had been a few minutes prior.

Nezu smiled again, though this time, a hint of warmth reached his eyes. "I believe I can think of a compromise that will give both the victim's family *and* the advocacy groups their closure, prevent any

eager arrests, and make some change in our society, for once.”

“We will trust your judgement, sir.” Ectoplasm spoke up for the first time, sending a somewhat warning glance to the rest of the staff in the room.

“Thank you,” Nezu replied cordially, before continuing with a more serious tone. “Now, we mustn’t treat these advocacy groups as the enemy. It is crucial we remember that a family has lost a mother, a sister, a daughter... Bushida Asumi is not just a symbol for change – she was just as much of a person as Bakugou Katsuki is. The only way we can hope to prevent something like this again is to work together.”

He let his words settle over the room before continuing.

“Now, onto operations. Classes cannot be held off forever. We still have a duty to the rest of the school, even if we pause practical lessons for the time being. Shota, I would like you to re-arrange timetables to make space for counselling sessions for anyone involved in the incident. Hound Dog will also be available for all other students outside of class time should they wish to see him - please ensure you encourage this.”

Aizawa nodded, “Of course. Though I imagine it’ll be a hell of a job to get Bakugou to actually open up to anyone.”

“How *are* your two most troublesome students faring?”

\*\*\*

Katsuki caught the heavy punching bag that swung back to meet him and clung to it as he pressed his sweaty face to the red leather in exhaustion. Blood dripped from his knuckles – he had ditched the



gloves after the first fifteen minutes of taking his frustration out. The pain was a welcome distraction. He hadn't seen or heard his mind's weird projection of Asumi since he had left the common room, but it didn't take away the loudness of his thoughts and the trembling in his hands. He felt on edge - a hyperbole of the sick feeling of anxiety when suddenly remembering he had left the front door unlocked, or something valuable on the train. His skin felt like it was crawling off his tendons, except where he had shredded it off of his knuckles.

He grits his teeth.

Despite his mind's version of Asumi growing silent as his rational mind spoke louder, fatigue has sent his primal flight-or-fight senses into overdrive. His nerves were on fire and there wasn't a damn thing he could do except ride it out

The sound of the dripping blood plopping onto the gym floor prompted him to peer down to see the damage he had done to the floor. Red ran down his hands and wrists and created a grim blood splatter pattern that spread across the floor like a web of veins.

His breath caught as he found his eyes fixated on it.

Blood. The smell of it clinging to his nose, even hours later. The feel of it squelching in his gloves. The sight of it as it spread out like watercolour under Asumi's caved-in head, bloody face covered in crimson cloth. Blood seeping out of Deku's chest. Blood leaving Deku's mouth. Blood leaving Deku's ears and coating his own.

*Blood, blood, blood, blood, blood, blood, bloo-*

“Bakugou.”

His spiralling paused. When had he even started to spiral? *Fucking snap out it. A little bit of blood going to scare you now? Get it together.*

He gave a grunt of acknowledgment to the voice, not even really registering who it was.

“Been hugging that bag for a while there.” A dry voice noted behind him with a hint of amusement. “Didn’t peg you as a cuddler.”

It was the mindfuck extra. Eyebags with the purple hair, whatever his name was, who had transferred into 2B earlier that academic year.

He sauntered in closer.

“Amazed that bag is still in one piece,” he added, nodding at Katsuki’s bloodied hands. “You should probably get that checked out.”

On any other day, this level of interaction would have at least earned Eyebags a singed pair of eyebrows and a barrage of threats, but today he just couldn’t bring himself to even give a shit, despite the obvious baiting.

Eyebags sighed as he continued to ignore him.

“Look, I’m not gonna comment on the really obvious elephant in the room right now,” he started, and Katsuki felt his shoulders tense up, “But it would be great if you could stop bleeding all over the floor; it’s pretty unhygienic, not to mention rude to hog the bag too, y’know.”

Katsuki spared him a glance. The extra stood slouched with his hands in his gym pants pockets, looking like he really could not give less of a shit about what was going on if he tried. The only indication of any stress was a slight tightening at the corner of his eyes. It would make sense he was on edge – he was late to transfer to the heroics course and probably beyond frustrated at the cancellation of classes, which was very much Katsuki's fault. He was pretty sure he considered Deku a friend too, not that he paid any attention to Deku's relationships, because he really couldn't care less about other people's business.

Great, he'd stared at him for too long and now Eyebags had the absolute audacity to look concerned.

"Have you even slept?" he questioned, squinting his bruised eyes at him dubitably. "You look worse than me, and that's saying something."

That almost provoked an irritated growl, but he swallowed it back when Asumi's face slithered into his peripheral. His gaze shifted slightly to her. He swallowed as she smiled and waved.

"Uh..." Eyebags was a bit hesitant now, also seeming confused at the lack of violence being directed at him. "Let me wrap your knuckles at least. Seriously, I don't know how you've not broken them."

He risked more than just a pair of singed eyebrows by apprehensively placing a hand on Bakugou's arm and gently guiding him toward a bench across the room next to the mounted first-aid kit. Luckily for him, the combination of accumulated sleep deprivation and hyperfixation on a woman who wasn't really there meant he barely even noticed what was happening, until he was sat on the bench against the wall and Eyebags was unravelling a roll of gauze.

“Give me your hand.”

“Fuck off.”

It was almost instinctual.

“Either I do it, or I’m dragging you to Recovery Girl and she can do it.”

“You’re a bastard.”

“I know. Hand.”

Katsuki, with the reluctance of someone instructed to shove their hand into a pit of vipers, did as instructed.

“Why the fuck would you want to help me?”

“I owe you. Also, I wasn’t kidding about the blood dripping. That’s some real gnarly shit.”

Katsuki's scowl deepened. “What the fuck could you possibly owe me?”

Anyone other than maybe Kirishima would have felt the inflection on ‘you’ cut them like a knife, but Eyebags didn’t seem to even notice.

“I heard you saved Midoriya,” he shrugged simply.

Katsuki scoffed. “Yeah? Did you also hear that I’m a *murderer*?”

Eyebags paused in his wrapping. “I heard that the villain was killed, yeah. So?”

“So? I’m a villain - you’re not supposed to murder the people you’re meant to save, jackass. Thought you were fucking creaming yourself over becoming a hero – it’s not very heroic to help a villain.”

*Her mouth dropped open, swaying on its hinges as she began to wail. Not a super-powered, Trigger-bolstered cry, but a genuine howl of agony and suffering as she wept black tears.*

*“Why didn’t you help me?” she whispered, her voice ethereal and wispy.*

He winced as the bandage was pulled a little tighter than necessary. “Heroes help when they can, but they can’t save everyone. Sometimes you have to prioritise your victims.”

Katsuki felt a rise of still-muted annoyance. “What the fuck do you know?”

“I know what it’s like to be labelled a villain,” he pointed out, tying off the first bandage and gesturing for his other hand. “And I know that neither of us are served well by first impressions.”

“You think you’re so fucking wise, don’t you? You’ve been spending

too much time with Eraserhead.”

This time, Eyebags let out a breath of amusement. “Not really. I don’t think any of us know how to deal with all of this.” He hesitated, then added with poignancy: “And nobody expects you to know how to either.”

Katsuki bristled and was stopped from pulling his hand away by a squeeze of Eyebag’s grip, “I’m fucking fine, Extra.”

“I’m not gonna pry. Frankly, I don’t really know you and it’s not my place. But I can’t, in good conscience, watch you self-destruct right in front of me in a gym that I want to use. That’s not very heroic at all.”

Katsuki barked out a laugh completely devoid of humour and yanked his hand away.

“Fuck you, self-destruct?!”

Eyebags looked back at him calmly. “You’re still bleeding from your self-inflicted hand injury.”

Shit, the asshole had a point. He shoved his hand back at him petulantly. They sat in silence as he finished tying it off.

“You’re done.”

Katsuki snatched his hand back and flexed his fingers, scrutinising his work. It was neat and tight, without cutting off the circulation.

Eyebags immediately got up and mooched back to the bag with a few wipes swiped from the kit, starting to clean up the bag and the surrounding floor.

“Where’d you stash the gloves?” he asked, without looking up.

“I launched them somewhere.”

“Great. Real helpful.”

“You’re welcome.”

He got to his feet, ignoring the immediate headrush from a lack of sleep and breakfast combined with exertion, and made his way in the general direction that the gloves were thrown in. Asumi watched him with interest.

He gathered them and shoved them in the Mindfucker’s line of sight. He looked up at him, surprised.

“Thanks,” Katsuki ground out gruffly, before turning on his heel and stalking out of the gym.

He missed the look of unease that crossed Shinsou Hitoshi’s face as he slid his phone out of his pocket and brought up the contact details for the only person he could think of.

They picked up pretty quickly, especially considering the hour and lack of classes to motivate an early rise.

“Shinsou, my maaaaan. What’s up?”

He ignored the enthusiastic greeting. “Tetsutetsu, hey. This is kinda weird but... do you still talk much with the hardening guy? Uh, Kirishima?”

He almost had to pull the phone away from his ear at the enthusiastic response. “My broooo! ‘Course I do! Such a manly inspiration to us all!”

“Yeah, okay. Look.” He hesitated, wondering if it was even worth the trouble this was probably going to cause him. But then the image of Bakugou Katsuki, of all people, limply staring at his own blood dribbling from self-inflicted split knuckles, looking for all intents and purposes like he was reliving a warzone, crossed his mind in a flash. He groaned. “This is so not my business but... do you think you could pass me his number? I need to ask him a favour...”

\*\*\*

Katsuki swore under his breath as he saw Aizawa stalking toward him as he approached the dorm.

“There you are,” Aizawa said, barely hiding a look of relief behind his usual stern and tired façade.

“Where the hell else would I be?” Katsuki growled, “Classes are fucking cancelled. Thought you’d be thrilled at least *one* of us would



keep on top of training.”

“*Language*. What happened to your hands?”

Katsuki shoved his hands into his pockets, refusing to make eye contact.

“Nothing. Accident.”

“Is that so?”

“No, I deliberately punched all the walls in the gym into rubble until my fingers liquidised. Have fun explaining that to the insurance company.”

“Bakugou.”

The stern voice deflated him.

Katsuki knew he could be a rude little asshole when he wanted to be, but unlike some students he could name, he did know when to back down to his superiors. Also, he happened to be really fucking tired and desperate for this conversation to be over and done with so he could go to bed and ditch the ghost that was fucking stalking him.

“We need to talk.”

Katsuki rolled his eyes. “What’s there to talk about?”

“This,” he gestured vaguely, “isn’t something we’ve trained you for. Intense media scrutiny, politics...” he looked him in the eye, “the death of an opponent.”

Katsuki scuffed his shoe as Asumi floated around Aizawa, poking at his scarf with interest. Aizawa continued on, obviously unaware of this.

“In response to the current state of affairs and the demand for mental health advocacy, U.A., Hound Dog will be available for all students to meet with as arranged within their timetabled hours.”

*Wait, what?*

“You, especially, are expected to attend a session.” His eye travelled warily to Katsuki's bandaged hands, still hidden in his pockets.

*Hang the fuck on.*

“You want me to see a shrink?” He blurted out in absolute horror.

Asumi glared at him, her black eyes rolling in a terrifying warning as if she sensed the growing hostility.

*“You’re surprised?” she hissed, “Look at the state of you.”*

“You’ve experienced a traumatic event.”

*“You’re weak.”*

He winced, and mentally pushed her to one side. She remained steadfastly stationed just past Aizawa’s shoulder, staring at him unblinkingly.

Aizawa, thankfully, seemed to mistake his countenance to be a response to his words. Of course he did. Why wouldn’t he? He had no idea what was going on just out of his line of sight, and he wasn’t going to find out either.

“I’m fine,” he ground out.

Aizawa looked less than convinced, but they were interrupted by another student – a first year General Studies girl – who passed them by, almost walking straight into them with her nose buried into her phone.

“Oops!” she diverted herself just in time to avoid a collision, and almost immediately recoiled at the demonic glare Aizawa gave her, towering over her petite frame, “I’m sorry!”

It was the same look Class A had come face-to-face with during their first day under Aizawa’s mentorship. If he’d had the emotional space or if he gave a crap about any of the other extras at the school, he might have almost felt a twinge of sympathy for her. The first time on the other end of that look was unsettling to say the least.

She scampered away, looking like the brief encounter had aged her a few years, and Aizawa seemed to shrink back to his slumped, tired

stance like a caterpillar entering a cocoon.

“Bakugou...”

Another gaggle of students materialised on the pathway, this time a group of third year Hero Course students who openly ogled at the pair of them as they ambled past, clearly on their way to the gym that Katsuki had re-decorated in his own blood.

Hopefully Eyebags had managed to get all that shit off the floor with his wipes from the First Aid box.

Aizawa looked more than a little displeased, but as the morning stretched on, the campus had simply become more busy, even with no classes being held that day.

He sighed.

“We’ll pick this up later, somewhere more private.” He conceded gruffly.

“You really don’t have to.”

Aizawa completely ignored him.

“I need to go and supervise –”

There was a crash from one of the training areas a little distance from the main campus. The three of them turned their heads to see a plume of smoke appearing from Ground Beta.

Aizawa sighed again, looking up at the heavens as if wishing for every deity to give him strength.

“– the first years before they hurt themselves.”

Before he headed off towards the younger year with some urgency, he took a moment to look Katsuki in the eyes. He looked back as much as he was able to without blasting the fuck away in case his teacher could somehow look directly into his soul through his eyeballs.

“You’ve got some good friends, Bakugou. Don’t push them away. I expect you will attend Hound Dog’s session as scheduled and I *expect* you to engage with him as is appropriate.”

“Sure thing.”

Aizawa gave him one more searching look, intense enough to set Katsuki’s nerves even further on edge (if that were even possible) before a second explosion tore his gaze away.

“I need to go.”

Katsuki gave what he hoped was a trademark, feral grin. “Give ‘em hell, sir.”

The grin dropped as soon as Aizawa's back was turned and he glanced warily back at Asumi.

She hadn't moved. She just kept staring.

\*\*\*

"Detective!" Nezu greeted with a cheery smile, but guarded eyes. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

Tsukauchi took his hat off, looking grim and took a seat in the chair opposite the Principal. "I imagine you know why I'm here."

Nezu kept the smile plastered to his face. "Would you like some tea?"

"No. Thank you." He folded his arms.

Nezu took his teapot in his tiny paws and poured two cups anyway.

"You're here to tell me that either Ms. Bushida's family – or one of their supporters - are trying to press charges, are you not?"

Tsukauchi looked a little unnerved at the relentless cheer coming from the tiny creature, but carried on all the same.

"I am."

“I see.” Nezu sipped his steaming cup. “Obviously, you won’t be leaving here with Bakugou Katsuki. I won’t allow it.”

Tsukauchi leaned back at his frankness and shook his head. “That’s not the outcome I want either, but we need to take the accusation seriously. They want to see a murder charge.”

Nezu hummed thoughtfully. “Although, I don’t see why I’m having tea with you, Detective, and not a representative from the jurisdiction in which this alleged crime took place.”

“U.A. is still a prestigious institution responsible for producing the country’s next top heroes. The superiors of both jurisdictions wanted this dealt with as quietly as possible, so they’ve surrendered the case to us. We’ve worked with the school before, and hopefully we can sort this out efficiently and effectively.”

“Oh my,” Nezu’s nose twitched with interest. “A delightful manipulation of procedure. Though of course, it doesn’t change the fact that an unfortunate accusation has been brought up against one of my students.

“Bakugou Katsuki was working under the instruction of a Pro-Hero agency, with a provisional license, in the defence of another student, as well as bystanders and incapacitated Pros. The situation is inauspicious, and I feel deeply for the family of the girl involved, but as far as the school is officially concerned, this was a matter of self-defence and collateral damage that’s part of the reality of fighting crime in any form. Our priority is the well-being of our students.”

Tsukauchi nodded. “And, between you and me, I don’t necessarily disagree. However, the protests are growing. The police need to respond in some way for the sake of keeping the peace.”

“At the expense of a schoolboy’s emotional well-being and future career?”

Tsukauchi rubbed at an eyebrow tiredly. “It’s not ideal.”

Nezu pushed the officer’s teacup towards him, gesturing expectantly until Tsukauchi took a sip. “Might I suggest an alternative?”

“I’m all ears.”

“Of course, I am displeased at the disruption the media attention and loud protests are causing to the education of my students. However, I’m not so naïve as to ignore the pressing and valid concerns about our current system and the way hero schools train their students. If it helps evolve the way things are done to fit our modern society, I would like to suggest an informal inquiry of sorts, rather than a criminal trial.”

Tsukauchi nodded slowly. “I mean, it could work. You’d be risking the inquiry not going the way that you would want, though, meaning we’d be straight back at having to investigate a murder, or at the very least, manslaughter.” He sipped his tea again. “Even if nothing comes of it and it’s thrown out of court or he’s found not guilty, the damage will be profound.”

Nezu smiled cheerfully again. “I’m well aware of the risks but, as I said before: no one will be removing Bakugou Katsuki from the U.A. grounds. I will not allow it, Detective.”



## Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! I really appreciate your time - any comments would be super appreciated! Have a lovely weekend!

# Chapter 6

## Chapter Notes

It's wild to me that 800 people have read this now. Whoa. Thanks everyone, especially those of you dropping feedback, kudos and bookmarking. It means the world! Have some Bakusquad as a thank you present.

Thanks again to applecider18 for their invaluable help and suggestions. This and last chapter were originally one 30 page behemoth so it was a HUGE job for them to go through and ping pong ideas with. Thank you so much again!

CW for something akin to suicide baiting (and I suppose, given the speaker is a figment of Bakugou's imagination, some form of suicidal thoughts, but nothing that hasn't been mentioned on the show before) and panic attacks. If you want to skip that bit, it starts at: "...as if he could see a physical reason as to why he couldn't use his Quirk." and ends on "Impulsively, Katsuki chucked a pillow towards her..."

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Said student gave up on trying to catch up on some sleep after he jerked awake for the third time from a vivid retelling (except with a significant addition of gore and violence thanks to his generous and over-active brain) of the events in the alleyway, with Asumi's horrific face inches from his own. He rolled over and grabbed his phone, glaring at the time as if it had personally insulted him. *Dinnertime*. He should probably show his face in case anyone dared to come up to his room under the pretence of 'checking on him', seeing how Aizawa and his weird pet-project both seemed to think he was losing it.

*He'd show them.*

He shoved on a pair of jeans, a t-shirt and shrugged a red shirt over the top to keep the chill off his arms. His phone was slipped into his back pocket as he locked the door behind him. Asumi simply floated through it, intent on making his growing headache even worse.

Most of the rest of the class was already downstairs, either pitching in with the cooking, flicking through the TV, or chaotically surrounded by bits of arts and crafts as they put together whatever ridiculous, elementary-school card and gift they were planning to dump on Deku.

No one acknowledged his arrival aside from Jirou who happened to notice him as he near-silently entered the space. She greeted him with a nod.

He ignored her.

**“In our opinion, this is a perfect example of why pro-Heroism needs reform!”** An angry voice cut through his ears like a gunshot. **“‘Villain’ is a deliberately provocative word to dehumanise and unfairly label mistreated rejects of a society that does too little to get involved until it’s too late. What Bakugou Katsuki did is nothing less than state-sanctioned murder, and the fact that the police refuse to take this seriously as a premeditated and even *predictable* killing from a clearly unstable and violent individual is a shame upon this country.”**

His mouth went dry. Asumi wrapped her arms around his waist, blood dripping onto his shoulders and running freezing waterfalls across his body. Her blood dripped from his hands, making a muffled thump onto the carpet as his vision tunneled onto the representative of the anti-Pro Hero group giving their view on some news station’s opinion corner.

**“Who’s to say that other ‘accidental deaths’ haven’t been deliberate shows of power and excessive force? Where are the investigations? Where’s the accountability? Who is going to...”**

“Dammit, Kaminari, turn that shit off!”

“But-“

Jirou’s earjack reached across the room, past the boy’s head, and flicked off the TV. Katsuki became acutely aware of a sea of heads suddenly turning towards him as they realised he had heard what was being said.

“Bakugou...”

“It’s fine,” he heard himself say.

He forced himself to walk to the fridge, diligently ignoring everyone’s stares, wrenching the door open even though he knew he didn’t have anything in there.

He was about to awkwardly close it before a bright yellow post-it note stuck atop a bento box caught his eye.

It was Ashido’s handwriting.

*Hey Blasty! It read. We made you mapo tofu last night – it should still be good for a couple of days. It’s nowhere near as great as yours, please be nice. We love you! <3 xxxx*

He blinked at it.

He took it from the shelf.

He closed the fridge door.

Asumi glowered at him.

*“If they knew what a monster you were, they wouldn’t love you. You don’t deserve their kindness. Their help. Their love. Just who do you think you are?”*

Conversation that had lulled in the background between the rest of the class gradually started back up again around him as he sat himself in the farthest corner of the dining room table and picked at his tofu.

They weren’t lying, it really wasn’t good.

If he’d eaten this even a few days ago, he would have blasted their asses for ignoring literally everything he had ever taught them about cooking and for daring to disrespect Todoroki Fuyumi’s recipe in such a manner. But now, even thinking about its lack of quality made his chest twist.

Asumi sat opposite him and watched him.

It made his stomach twist too and any appetite almost immediately fizzled out.

He continued to spread the food around with his chopsticks, scowling down into it and hoping he made it abundantly clear that he wasn’t in

the mood for casual conversation.

Most people got the hint.

Kirishima notably continued to keep away from him, choosing instead to shovel down his bowl of rice and vegetables next to the girls, Sero, and Kaminari, who were crafting get-well gifts and occasionally taking bites of their own food. Katsuki could still occasionally feel his eyes on him, though.

His stomach twisted further.

*“What’s wrong?” Asumi simpered. “I thought you liked it when people did as you told?”*

His small bubble of spiralling misery was popped when Sero and Kaminari threw themselves into chairs at the table: Kaminari next to him and Sero opposite, startlingly close to Asumi.

*“Hey, Kacchaaaaan!”*

*“K-K-Kach...”*

*The thin voice made him wrench his eyes back open to face the horrified ones staring intently back at him. They closed as soon as he did, as Midoriya let out a series of, frankly terrifying, splutters and coughs, blood clinging to the sides of his mouth.*

*“Shut up!”*

“How’re you doing?” Sero asked with a bit more dignity than Kaminari.

“*Great*,” he growled, forcing down the involuntary reminder of Deku drowning in his own blood in some godforsaken alleyway in the backend of fucking nowhere. Forcing down the image of him choking on his own infected lungs in some godforsaken hospital in the backend of fucking nowhere, away from his friends and family, whilst Katsuki sat here and ate fucking tofu and felt sorry for himself.

“Sorry about the news there, dude,” Kaminari piped up, cheerfully picking up some chicken with his chopsticks, “We didn’t realise you were stood there.”

Katsuki shrugged. “It’s whatever.”

“You know none of us agree with her... right?” Sero asked slowly.

“*They’re lying*,” Asumi hissed into his ear, appearing out of nowhere and leaning past Kaminari to practically lick his earlobe. Next to him, he pretended not to notice how Kaminari’s smile dropped just a little at Sero’s words.

“I know.”

He wasn’t too sure who he was replying to.

“Good,” Sero replied, with a sigh of relief, “We’re here for you, bro.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he vaguely registered Kaminari avert uncertain eyes to the floor. He was too tired to even begin to unpack that right now.

An awkward silence fell upon them before Kaminari uncomfortably gestured at his bento box of tofu: “You eatin’ that?”

He shoved it towards him, “It’s yours.”

Kaminari pushed it back, “Not what I meant, dude. It’s just...” he seemed to brace himself for danger, “when was the last time you ate?”

Sero watched them closely.

“About five fucking seconds ago before you two losers sat down,” he ground out defensively. It wasn’t technically a lie but, now it had been mentioned, he wasn’t actually too sure what the real answer was. It couldn’t have been almost a week ago when he and Kirishima ate noodles together and made plans to get the train, could it?

A few bites of hospital food forced upon him by the doctors here, a few hospital snacks when hovering in Deku’s room there... but proper food? The last time he properly ate probably was those super spicy noodles that ended up being vomited up in the back of an ambulance.

*How the fuck did that happen?*

He was normally religious in ensuring he ate the right things –



macros, micros, calories, you name it, he had calculated it. It was absolutely vital with the level of training and physical work that went into both his classes at U.A. and whilst working with the pros.

He looked back down at the tofu, knowing he needed to force it down.

But he just couldn't bring his stomach to do it.

"Uh... Bakugou?"

Great, now he was zoning out again.

He shoved the box back towards Kaminari.

"Here."

He got up and headed towards the stairs, Asumi twirling along with him like a toddler on an autumn walk.

\*\*\*

The next morning, he was woken from an increasingly broken sleep by an insistent vibrating in his ear from his phone, which he completely ignored.

What he couldn't ignore, however, was the absolutely incessant knocking on his door. He tolerated it for all of 60 seconds before wrenching it open, nearly ripping the thing off of its hinges. On the

other side, with approximately zero fucks given, was Raccoon-Eyes.

“Hey, Bakugooooou.” she greeted cheerfully, like she hadn’t just woken him up when he had finally slept for more than a half-hour stretch.

“What the fuck do you want?” he greeted in return, waiting for the incoming lecture from Asumi. She simply stared at him from her corner, her head characteristically tilted like her strings had been cut awkwardly.

“A few of us were heading down to one of the training rooms. Aizawa gave us the go-ahead to do some sparring!”

Katsuki immediately opened his mouth to flatly say the word ‘no’ and slam the door in the idiot’s stupid face, but he paused. The noise and concentration from sparring would be a good distraction from Asumi’s constant narration of his failures and shortcomings. The lack of classes and work study had meant he hadn’t trained in way too long and the last thing he needed was to get rusty. Losing his mind or not, he was still going to be the number one hero.

*“You really think you can still be a hero after you murdered me?”* Asumi croaked, before laughing hysterically. *“You really think you can still be a hero after falling apart at a single casualty?”*

“I’ll do it,” he heard himself proclaim, again not entirely sure who he was replying to.

Besides, since when did Bakugou Katsuki turn down a chance to fight? People would catch on and question that immediately, and he just couldn’t deal with the concern and, god forbid, *pity* that would come from that.

Also, he usually paired with Kirishima as he was the only person who could take a full blast from his Quirk. The thought filled him with more hope than he'd ever admit to.

Unfortunately, by the time he arrived in his gym clothes with a bottle of water, Kirishima had already partnered with Ponytail, though he had the good grace to shoot an apologetic look Bakugou's way. Kaminari paired himself a little too quickly with Sero when he caught his eyes.

He partnered with Raccoon-Eyes instead.

Asumi had finally shut up for the time being and hovered somewhere out of view as Aizawa tiredly rolled into the room.

“Try not to kill each other or burn the building down. Begin.”

What a rousing speech.

As Aizawa curled up in a corner and went back to his nap, Ashido - with surprising reflexes - immediately jumped into gear and went straight in with a quick attack, using her acid to aid her speed.

Katsuki immediately jumped backward – it wasn't difficult. As much as Pinky had improved, she still wasn't even close to his level of agility and power.

He instinctively went to let off a reasonably harmless blast hear her upper leg to knock her off-balance as she slid past him, but –

completely unbidden – Asumi’s awful, disfigured face flashed in front of him and made him completely freeze. He sensed Ashido using the momentum from the missed hit to spin back around to throw a handful of acid aimed at his shoulder.

He barely dodged in time.

“Damn, Blasty,” Ashido chirped, “Are you still half asleep?”

He shook his head to force himself to pay attention. *Focus, for fuck’s sake. This is embarrassing.*

Ashido was quick but reasonably predictable once you got to know her fighting style and understood her Quirk. The biggest annoyance for her opponent was her agility and ability to contort her body or use her acrobatic skill to avoid long-range attacks. Her reflexes were only improving with every fight she partook in, but she still had a habit of leaving herself wide open when she mentally left the fight to regulate the potency of her acid. It was only a split-second, but one that could be exploited when her opponent figured out her tell, which, of course, Katsuki had on his second instance of fighting her.

She pressed her palms together and her head bowed minutely. That was the window to attack.

She was right in firing range.

He braced his palm in front of him, ready to perform a stun grenade to knock her off-balance as she skated towards him.

Nothing happened.

Even Ashido herself seemed surprised when she tackled him with a shoulder to his abdomen and they landed on the floor, her straddling his waist with his arms pinned above him.

She looked down at him in shock, her mouth hanging open in absolute betrayal as blood spilled from her charred mouth.

“*Blasty?*” she whimpered. He looked back at her in despair. The explosion had ripped a hole through her stomach.

“Bakugou?”

He blinked. He was back to staring up at her completely undamaged face.

*Snap out of it.*

“*Shit.*”

“Are you.... okay?” she asked, uncharacteristically hesitant.

“I’m *fine*,” he snarled, before bucking his hips violently and taking her by surprise. He used this surprise and momentum to roll them over, pinning her instead.

The spar had lasted less than a minute. They weren’t even out of breath.

“Maybe we should warm up a bit first?” she suggested, still sounding uncertain. Katsuki felt a vein throbbing in his forehead. “Quirkless sparring for a bit then go back to it?”

“*Weak!*” Asumi giggled from somewhere behind him.

“Whatever.”

Regular sparring felt better – a little more rhythmic and almost soothing. Asumi was silent once more and Ashido clearly had to work harder than before. Their breaths grew harsh as they panted and their arms became slick with sweat and made grabbing onto each other trickier. Both had shed their jackets, both left in black vests as they carried on trying to dodge, feint and attack one another.

Ashido had just managed to land a solid kick to his abdomen as Bakugou took the opportunity to swipe his leg at her calf as she was off-balance, knocking her off her feet. She landed on the mat with a thump and an ‘oof!’ as all the air was struck out of her.

They both took a moment to catch their breath, Katsuki with his hands on his hips standing over Ashido, who stretched out on the mat and closed her eyes.

“Damn,” she panted, eyes still closed from fatigue, “Nice one, Blast. That was... intense.”

Katsuki didn’t reply but did nudge her with his foot to get her attention and reached a hand out for her to grab and get back on her feet.

She took it just as Satou roared from across the room: “Look out!”

Both their heads instinctively shot to look towards the source of the noise – it wasn’t entirely clear what had happened, but what *was* entirely clear was the large piece of debris that was hurtling towards them. Next to them, Invisible Girl and Tail Guy had jumped out of the way. Katsuki immediately dropped Ashido’s hand and placed his own palm between them and the hunk of concrete hurtling towards them, planning to simply blast it into harmless gravel.

Nothing happened.

Ashido screamed.

But the impact never came.

Kirishima had thrown himself in front of them both in his Unbreakable form. The debris smashed into him with a horrifically loud crash, like a meteor hitting a mountain and immediately shattered into a million harmless pieces. Ashido covered her eyes as she was sprinkled with dust and small pieces of stone.

Kirishima looked back at the two of them, not even marred with a scratch.

“You guys okay?!” he cried worriedly.

Ashido nodded and scrambled to her feet. Katsuki simply stared at him, his useless hand still outstretched.

“What happened?” an irate voice from behind him demanded. He swallowed and turned, ready to be lectured to all hell and beyond for failing to actually engage his Quirk and his brain... but Aizawa’s fierce gaze wasn’t aimed at him. It looked beyond him to a very embarrassed-looking Uraraka and Satou.

“I’m so sorry!” Uraraka voiced immediately, bowing her head at her teacher.

“No, it was my fault,” Satou interrupted. “I dislodged some of the concrete. Uraraka used it against me, and I punched it to break it up. I misjudged it and just blasted it across the room instead.”

“And I released it thinking it would just drop but it just made things worse!” Uraraka piped up, her already-pink cheeks bright red. “Are you guys okay? I’m so –“

“Enough.” Aizawa tiredly raised a hand. They immediately closed their mouths. “Any injuries?”

“No sir!” The class chorused.

“Then you’re done for today. Go back to the dorms. Uraraka. Satou. You stay.”

Ashido winced in the corner of Katsuki’s eye. He didn’t envy them at all either.

He felt Kirishima hovering near his shoulder.



“Dude, are you...”

“Fuck off,” He muttered and stalked off ahead of the rest of the class before he could regret it.

Inside his chest, his heart pounded so hard against his chest that he could almost taste it in his mouth.

*Why the fuck couldn't he use his Quirk?*

He managed to hold it somewhat together before getting back into his room, practically collapsing through the door. He held the wrist of the hand that failed to blast the rock away and stared at it in dismay with wide eyes, as if he could see a physical reason as to why he couldn't use his Quirk.

He felt his breath catching painfully in his chest and breathing in felt like gasping through a straw packed with cement.

“Aw, *what happened?*” Asumi simpered from a twisted crouch in her corner, “*Sad you can't blow up anyone else's skull?*”

Katsuki collapsed onto his bed, his head between his hands as he tried to control his breathing. It wasn't working. He could hear his dismal, wrecked gasps somewhere through whatever was muffling his ears. Asumi, however, was clear as day.

“*Without your Quirk, you're nothing. What's the point of you?*” she sneered, as blood dripped from the corner of her mouth, “*Useless.*”

*Worthless. Why would anyone bother with you now without your flashy power?"*

A sob burst from somewhere deep in his chest.

*No. No. Breathe. Focus.*

He forced air into his lungs. Again. And then again.

*"Maybe you should take your own advice now and take that swan-dive off the roof,"* Asumi pondered, in the same tone as if she were suggesting somewhere to eat for lunch. *"At least you'd be one less menace to society."*

Impulsively, Katsuki chucked a pillow towards her. She disappeared before it could pass through her. The ensuing silence was almost worse.

With a cold sense of fear, he realised with the silencing of her voice that footsteps had been heading across the hallway, getting closer and closer to his room. He held his breath as they paused outside his door as if the owner of the footsteps was debating whether to knock on his door or leave him be. His breath released in a relieved sigh as the footsteps started again, before stopping at Kirishima's door. He could hear him unlock it and close it behind him with a click, though he didn't lock it again.

More guilt to add to the pile.

\*\*\*

Everything turned to shit three days later.

Three more days of minimal sleeping. Three more days of minimal eating. Three more days of hiding in the gym, in his room, in the library – anywhere that he could hide and try to ignore Asumi's increasingly loud and vicious jibes and character assassinations. Three more days of avoiding Aizawa like the fucking plague. Three more days of Kirishima avoiding *him* like the fucking plague out of some misplaced concern, but still leaving him bento boxes in the fridge and tea at his door first thing in the morning. Three more days of avoiding any news about himself, about the murder, about Deku that was steadily coming in via Uraraka's phone.

Three more days of adamantly denying that he was circling the fucking drain.

By this point, even he wasn't too sure how the fuck he was still standing. He had noticed a pattern with Asumi: the more turbulent his emotions, the louder she became. The kinder people were, the harsher she became. Days became a constant battle of just looking for some goddamn peace and quiet away from her, so he just avoided everything. Nights were even worse.

By early afternoon, after those three days, he had essentially passed out on his bed, his body refusing to comply with this abuse for much longer.

The same old dream started again like someone had flicked on a movie projector right at the exact moment that Deku was skewered.

Except for this time, it was different.

This time, Deku and Asumi worked in tandem, battling against him in

a coordinated dance of deafening screams and sickly green lightning. This time, *he* had the sword in his hand. He watched in muted horror as Deku's face twisted like Asumi at her most nightmarish, eyes turning black and dripping as his face morphed into a ghoulish smile.

Asumi stood behind him, seductively running her hands over Deku's arms and stomach like a lover.

Nausea punched into his gut at the sight.

All of a sudden, they leapt at him.

He panicked and ripped the pin from his grenade.

The huge, white blast tore into their faces and they glowed repulsively for a long moment before slumping to the floor in a pile.

Katsuki found himself staggering to them.

Their faces were gone, their skulls in tatters.

Tears sprung to his eyes.

"No."

His heart leapt into his throat as Deku twitched, his dislocated arm shoving underneath him to hoist himself up.

*He couldn't be... no one could have survived that.*

Like a broken puppet, Deku forced himself up.

“Oh God, *Deku*.”

He had practically decapitated him.

“I'm so sorry. I'm *so sorry*.”

Deku impossibly laughed.

“What's wrong? Isn't this way more satisfying than me jumping from a roof?”

Katsuki's mouth dropped in utter horror.

“No. *Izuku*. No.”

Deku... no, *Izuku* laughed again, the shrill sound grating on Katsuki's already frayed nerves.

“It's yours now. You can have it.” He reached out a blood-soaked hand. “All yours. Now you can be Number One. You never have to deal with me again.”

“No. No. I don’t want it. It’s yours.”

“Come on, Kacchan,” he wheedled, before growing impatient and clamping his hand over his mouth. The taste of blood filled his entire body. He screamed in protest.

And woke up still screaming, a metallic taste filling his mouth still.

He forced himself to stop, but sat upright in bed, shoving the twisted blankets from around his sweaty and shaking body. His hand covered his mouth to hide the sound of his hysterical, ragged breathing. Beyond the open curtain, the sky was pitch black and silent – it must have been very late.

There was no way Kirishima didn’t hear that. He’d be lucky if Ashido, Uraraka, or Tentacles didn’t hear him either.

He punched the mattress with his free hand in frustration. He couldn’t stop his eyes from involuntarily welling up. Asumi was there like a shot.

*“Murderer. Murderer. Murderer.”*

“Please leave me *alone*.”

He fucking hated how desperate he sounded.

*“Murderer. Murderer. Murderer. MURDERER. MURDERER.”*

He threw the blankets all the way off his legs, shot out of bed, and covered his ears.

The stress of the nightmares, Asumi’s constant taunting, the lack of food, the lack of sleep... everything just suddenly became very overwhelming and the next thing he knew, he was outside Kirishima’s door and hammering it with his fist like his life depended on it.

It opened almost immediately after the first knock. As if the occupant had been waiting for him.

It must have been an absolute sight to behold.

Bakugou Katsuki in his sweat-soaked pyjamas at one in the morning, tears stinging his cheeks, hair an explosive nightmare from tossing and turning, and voluntarily going to someone else for help.

It didn’t faze Kirishima though, who immediately gathered him in his arms and led him into his room, locking the door behind them with no judgement and no comment.

His large hand gripped the side of his neck and forced Katsuki’s eyes to meet his own, burning with compassion and desperation to help.

“Please, let us help you.”

It was the first sentence his best friend had uttered to him in four

whole days.

“I didn’t mean to,” fell out his mouth immediately and, with equal parts horror and resignation, the flood didn’t stop. “I didn’t mean to kill anyone. I was aiming for her feet, but I couldn’t see and she was going to kill Deku and... I *can’t hurt him anymore*. I can’t be the reason we lose *another* symbol of peace or hope or whatever the *fuck*, Kirishima.”

He felt himself being pushed onto the mattress, the arm around his shoulders never leaving.

“I’m so sorry I lost my shit on you, you don’t deserve that. And fuck, you still tried to help me, anyway – don’t think I didn’t notice the bentos and the tea and sending those other extras over to check up on me. No way Duncie-Face and Tape Dispenser are that fucking emotionally literate. You saved Ashido in training because I was too fucking *weak*. I don’t deserve it. I don’t deserve *you*. I should be rotting in a fucking jail and forgotten about.”

“Bakugou, no...”

“I’m constantly reminded of what I’ve done. Who I am. A villain. A murderer. Who the fuck do I think I am, still pretending I’m a fucking hero? It’s so loud, all the time. *All* the time. She never goes away.

“I can’t take it anymore. She follows me everywhere. She won’t leave me alone. She’s always *there*.”

“Who is, buddy?” Kirishima's voice had taken on a gentle, cautious tone.



“Asumi. What the hell am I supposed to do? I... I don’t know what to do! I can’t bring her back. I know she’s not real, but I still hear her. I *deserve* all of this. Everything they’re saying is right,” he babbled. Kirishima rubbed a hand down his arm, tightening it protectively.

“Dude. I know you’re not going to believe me right now but... I know you. And I know that’s not true.”

“I’m a fucking monster, Kirishima. You don’t even know the half of it.”

“A real monster would be able to walk away from that fight and never think about it again. A real man would reflect and feel something for what happened,” Kirishima reasoned. “And, from what I can see, you’ve reflected and feel a whole lot of something.”

Katsuki didn’t reply, still shaking where he sat. There were too many words, too many emotions and they all seemed to bottleneck somewhere around his heart. He was so *tired*.

“Look. You’re not in a good place. You need to eat. You need to *sleep*, man.”

“I *can’t*.”

“I know it’s tough, I know. But please try. We’ll figure things out in the morning, okay?”

Katsuki felt himself nod, and only because, despite the unstoppable flood of emotions he didn’t know how to handle, he could feel himself practically collapsing where he sat.

Kirishima stood up and held a hand out to him, which Katsuki hesitantly took. He stood too.

Kirishima turned away for a second and pulled back his duvet. “In you get, bro.”

“What? No.”

Kirishima’s voice took on a no-nonsense quality that Katsuki had never heard before: “Get into the bed, Katsuki.”

He did so, practically collapsing into the pillows, eyes shutting immediately.

“Move up.”

He did so without thinking, barely aware enough to notice when the mattress dipped down next to him.

“Try and get some sleep. I’ll be here if you need me.”

He was vaguely aware of the brightness of Kirishima’s phone and the tapping of his fingers on the screen as he clearly sent a text before exhaustion crashed into him painfully and he felt his consciousness fleeing in panic. The last thing he was aware of was of a hand circling his wrist.

“It’ll be okay, man. I promise.”

## Chapter End Notes

Thanks once again for reading! The next chapter is written but I imagine now will also need going over and possibly editing to make sure it works with the re-writing of previous chapters so an update may be a little later than planned. Please do leave some feedback, especially stuff you liked and what you'd like to see (so I know for the future what works and what doesn't!) and have a lovely Christmas if you celebrate it :)

# Chapter 7

## Chapter Notes

EDIT: 2nd January 2022: I've noticed some weird formatting errors - mostly incorrect spacing, italics, bold etc - that have randomly appeared when posting. I'm not sure why this is happening on the site, but I'm editing them as I catch them. Please do let me know if you spot anything I've missed!

(Just ignore the chapter count steadily increasing. Started as an intended one-shot, now expecting 10 chapters at least. Ha. Help.)

Sorry for the delay here - thank you for the kudos and comments as usual, I really appreciate them! And once again, thank you very much to applecider18 for their invaluable contribution!

Updates may become a little on the patchy side - the next few chapters are written but in terms of editing, I may be a bit stuck for time due to work and Masters deadlines. My profession was badly hit with Covid-related absences pre-Omicron and now that cases are at multiple hundreds of thousands a day, the next few months are going to be extremely hard.

Keep safe and have a lovely week! :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku was Bored with a capital B. Bored of being bored. Bored of being stuck in bed. Bored of coughing. Bored of feeling sticky. Bored, bored, bored, bored.

Mom had arrived the day before last, practically bursting the door open with a wave of tears and a wailed '*Izuuuukkkuuuu!*' which had him flushing even more with embarrassment and Todoroki smirking at his humiliation.

"I'm fine, mom, honestly," he'd managed to grind out from where his mouth was shoved against her shoulder as she held him tightly and fussed. It was all fun and games for Todoroki until she'd rounded on

him, almost looking angry in her intensity.

“And you! You’ve been taking care of my son?”

“Uh...”

He was immediately drawn into a very tight, very wet hug and this time, Izuku was the one who was snorting at him as his eyes bugged open and he looked very unsure as to where to place his hands.

“Thank you,” she had crowed sincerely.

Thinking about it, he’d thought it was rather silly that Midoriya found this treatment so arguable. He was quite enjoying being cuddled so intensely by someone so warm and motherly; it was like being smothered by a very snuggly, very green, and very damp marshmallow. He settled for placing two tentative hands on her shaking shoulder blades. Did she require patting or...?

“Mom, mo– Hey. Let him go,” Izuku had pleaded before breaking off into a few wet-sounding coughs.

She had let go of Todoroki in an instant and rounded back on her son.

“Put that mask back on at once, young man.”

He had fumbled in his haste to comply. He didn’t hear that tone too often.

Having been released, Todoroki had taken it as his cue to leave.

“I should head back. Iida has made a very strict schedule for us both to keep on top of our schoolwork.”

He had frowned when Midoriya tittered at his comment about Iida, muffled by the mask just enough to get away with it.

“Of course,” Inko had smiled and dipped her head in gratitude, “I really do appreciate both of your help.” She turned back to her son apologetically.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t get here sooner.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow.” Todoroki had bowed his head somewhat awkwardly, before seeing himself out.

After everyone had said their goodbyes, Inko sat heavily in the seat that Todoroki had abandoned and sighed. She had looked exhausted. Upon closer examination, she seemed more unkempt than usual, hair poking out around her bun in tufts and dark circles under her eyes. Her wrinkles had never been more pronounced – he’d realised with a jolt, perhaps for the first time ever, that she wasn’t getting any younger. The stress he put her through must finally be taking its toll.

“I’m so sorry, mom,” he’d eventually whispered, the infamous Midoriya tears springing to his eyes. “I’m *really* sorry.”

Inko had wrapped a small hand around his and squeezed it

comfortingly. "I know that this comes with being a hero. And I know how much you want to be a hero."

He nodded, tears dribbling down his cheeks.

"But, Izuku. Honey. You've not even *left school* yet and... here you are," her voice cracked. "Again."

"I know," he whispered, not trusting his voice not to crack on his tears if he spoke any louder.

"If it wasn't for Katsuki... where would I be now? The ICU? A... a cre..." her voice broke once more on that word, "it doesn't even bear thinking about what could have happened if he wasn't there, Izuku," she sniffed, tears now streaming down her own face in earnest.

He gently reached out a hand, manoeuvring around the IV lines, to catch the tears on her cheeks and whisper, "Please don't cry, mom."

She caught his hand and pressed it to her mouth.

"I love you so much, Izuku. I would never ask you to give up your dream but please... *please* stop doing this to me."

Izuku's throat had tightened even more, causing his chest to stiffen with pain, but pushed it down. He couldn't lie to her and make promises he couldn't keep.

"I love you too, Mom. I'm sorry."

There was then a tentative knock on the door. Both Midoriyas wiped their eyes before Inko had called out a shaky, "Come in."

All Might's lanky figure silhouetted the doorway, his wild hair blocking the fluorescent light from the hallway.

"All Might!" Izuku had exclaimed in greeting, which triggered the vice in his chest and prompted yet another round of wretched coughing. He dragged a ragged, noisy breath in as it subsided and avoided his mother's sad eyes. By the time his senses were back to being reasonably sharp, he'd noticed All Might was sat next to his mother and also regarding him sorrowfully.

It made him uncomfortable.

"Well, I *did* come in to ask how you were..." All Might tried for light-hearted, but his tone disappeared into the negative cloud that had overtaken the room.

"I'm feeling better," he had replied, before catching his mother's disbelieving look. "No, really. I am. I'm not *well*, but I feel better than before! They were actually able to do some Quirk healing this morning."

"That's wonderful."

Izuku hummed in response. A silence had filled the air awkwardly, the only sound being the constant humming of the oxygen machine.



“Have you been keeping in touch with your friends?”

Izuku frowned.

“No. Well, kinda through the medium of Todoroki and Iida. My phone was smashed in the... when we... in the alleyway.”

Inko had sniffed. Izuku had cringed.

“We’ll have to arrange you a replacement.”

Izuku hummed again.

He’d practically *felt* his mother getting riled up again. The last thing he needed or wanted right now was for her to start telling off his mentor again... but, to her credit, his mother held her tongue.

“Have you heard anything about Kacchan?”

All Might’s brows raised as if he wasn’t expecting the question.  
“Young Bakugou?”

Izuku coughed into his hand in confirmation and nodded to make his point clear.

“Not much, I’m afraid. Though, I do hear the rest of your friends are eagerly waiting for you to come home.”

The mention of his friends caused a wave of relief that relaxed hidden muscles that he hadn't even realised were tensed, but his heart still skipped a beat. It was always nice to be reminded of how much they cared, and it was even more reassuring to be reminded that this meant that Kacchan was also surrounded by safe people – including Mr. Aizawa and Kirishima – who could remind him of what an amazing hero he would be in the future, regardless of what was going on right now.

*Because that was what Kacchan was, he reminded himself furiously, a hero.*

There was no alternative.

*Right?*

“When *can* I leave?”

Inko's eyes had practically popped out of her skull. “Not any time soon, that's for sure,” she retorted sternly. “Don't give me that look, Izuku. You need to stay put until the doctors say you can leave, and not a moment sooner.”

And so, Izuku found himself Bored with a capital-B. There were only so many games on his Switch he could re-play. There were only so many card games he could teach Todoroki (though it was highly entertaining to watch him very slowly get the hang of it, only to immediately thrash Iida in every single game, much to Iida's flustered annoyance and emphatic arm-chopping). There was only so much time he could spend sitting and stewing and pondering about what he was missing. Todoroki had all but confirmed that the media were causing trouble but since then, everyone had been tight-lipped around

him or avoided the question.

If the tactic was meant to be keeping his stress levels low, it was failing.

At least he'd been upgraded from an oxygen mask to a nasal cannula not long after a second round of Quirk healing, but the price was an awful lot of time lost to dozing and zoning out.

On the plus side, he had finally been gifted a new phone to transfer his salvaged SIM card into and he wasted no time messaging the Class 2-A chat, quickly skimming the hundreds of missed messages in the group.

*Dekuuuuuuu:* **Hey guys!**

*Infinity Girl:* **OMGGGGG**

He smiled to himself as his phone immediately lost its mind, vibrating almost continuously as a barrage of excited greetings flung themselves into his inbox.

[*Jamming-Whey* (<sup>o</sup>□<sup>o</sup>) changed his name to *Hemingway* `□\_□´ ]

*Hemingway* `□\_□´ : **aw yeaaaaah! he lives!**

[*Jack* changed *Hemingway* `□\_□´ 's name to *Jamming-Whey* (<sup>o</sup>□<sup>o</sup>)]

*Jamming-Whey* (ᵃᵇ) : jirou pls

*Alien Kweeeeen*: midorrrriiii! how r u???

*Prince of Darkness*: I'm pleased to see you've left the tempting arms of the abyss, Midoriya. It's good to hear from you.

*Jack*: Ditto :) Can I send a playlist on here or do you need me to send you over an old iPod or something?

*Shouto*: I'm glad someone finally gave you a phone. Can I stop sending messages to Uraraka for you now?

*Alien Kweeeeen*: omg

*Budget Spiderman*: Hey, who changed my name again? How's it going, Midoriya?!

*Alien Kweeeeen*: OMG

*Dekuuuuuuu*: I'm doing better thanks! What have I missed? @Jack thanks for thinking of me!!!! I can download my Spotify onto here no problem!

*Tenta-Cool*: Glad to hear you're doing well, buddy.

*Alien Kweeeeen*: OCHAKO! R THE REST OF U SRSLY GOING 2 IGNORE THAT???

*Snow White:* (\*^▽^\*)

*Alien Kweeeeen:* @Infinity Girl !?!?!?!?

*Budget Spiderman:* Seriously , who thought making Ashido and Jirou group admins was a good idea?

*Alien Kweeeeen:* @Shouto what were they saying???? i need 2 knooooooooooooooooow!!!!

[Jack has muted *Alien Kweeeeen*]

*Lil' Perv:* hey! i dont even know how to change it back u jerks!

*King Prez:* I insist you cease ganging up on a fellow classmate in this manner.

[*Alien Kweeeeen* changed *King Prez's* name to *Dad Joke*]

*Dad Joke:* Ashido!

*Infinity Girl:* loooooo

*Yaomomo:* It's a relief to hear from you, Midoriya. Is there anything you need?

*Froppy*: I'm so happy to hear you're doing well!

*Jack*: I've sent you the link on a private chat so it doesn't get lost in here.

*Invisi-Queen*: Yaaaay! Midoriya's back! Heyyyy!

☆*Sparkles*☆: C'est très magnifique to hear from you again, mon ami! <3

*Tails*: nice one, midoriya! pleased to hear from you. you've not missed much!

*Sugar Sugar*: Hope you're ready for loads of cake when you're back man!

*Tails*: (legit, we've discovered satou's a stress baker)

*Dekuuuuuuu*: Thanks everyone! I've really missed you all!

Izuku smiled to himself again. He really *did* miss his friends. But they still weren't answering his questions, and there was a sizeable Kirishima and Kacchan-sized hole in the responses, too.

He shifted restlessly. He just wanted everything to go back to normal.

*Jamming-Whey* (ᵃᵇ) : any clue when ur coming home?

*Dekuuuuuuu:* Ugh

*Infinity Girl:* Not good?

[*Jack* has unmuted *Alien Kweeeeen*]

*Dekuuuuuuu:* Couple days at least I think

*Jack:* Dude that sucks

*Alien Kweeeeen:* aw hoooon, it's been like a whole week now! id be soooo bored omg

*Dekuuuuuuu:* Yeah. Not so bad now I've got my phone and switch and stuff (thanks @*Infinity Girl* !) but it's still sooo boring

*Shouto:* How rude. See if I play poker with you again.

*Dad Joke:* I never want to play poker with you again, @*Shouto*

*Shouto:* I won't apologise for being better than you.

*Alien Kweeeeen:* omg hahahahaha

Izuku paused and tried again.

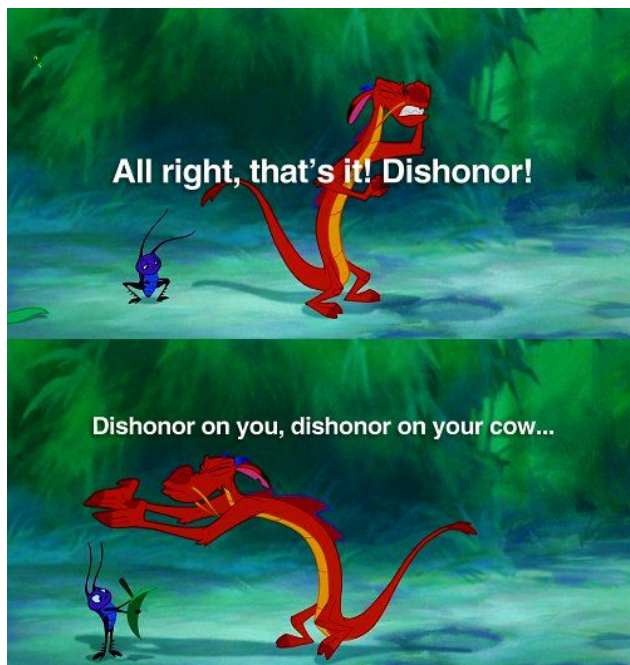
*Dekuuuuuuu:* **So what have I missed?**

*Jack:* **@Alien Kweeeeen made mapo tofu. It sucked ass.**

*Invisi-Queen:* **We made you something!**

*Shouto:* **Is it better than @Alien Kweeeeen's mapo tofu? Her version of my sister's recipe was, frankly, an insult. You dishonoured her.**

*Budget Spiderman:* **Uh oh. You've done it now!**



*Budget Spiderman :*





He typed and re-typed a few times before settling on a simple opener.

*Dekuuuuuuu: Hey*

There was a very long pause – it felt like an hour with his stomach churning anxiously, before finally, the message turned to *read*.

It took another five minutes for the chat to ping. He fumbled with his phone in his haste to open it.

*[Lord Explosion Murder has changed his name to Bakugou]*

*[Bakugou has left the chat]*

A quick glimpse at the main 2-A chat showed the same, followed by several messages expressing sad emojis and a couple of comments, but no one seemed surprised.

To: Kiri (•\_•')

*Dekuuuuuuu: Hey*

*Dekuuuuuuu: Please tell me what's going on.*

*Kiri (•\_•'): sry dude, not ignoring you. just super busy atm – promise 2 catch up with you later*

Izuku let his hands slump to his lap where the phone slipped from his lax fingers.

*Dammit.*

After a pause, he changed tactics, pulling up his contacts list and hitting call.

The phone rang for a few seconds before a reassuring voice answered.

*“Izuku, my boy,”* All Might answered in greeting. *“Is everything alright?”*

“Yeah.” His fingers tightened around the device. “But... can you come here?”

All Might immediately sounded concerned. Izuku supposed it wasn’t often that he asked All Might to go out of his way for him.

*“Of course,”* he replied earnestly. *“I’m on my way now. Are you alright?”*

“I’m fine, but...” he paused, wondering how much detail to go into over the phone, before settling on: “I just need to talk to you.”

All Might could probably figure out what this was about and that was enough.

The sigh confirmed that thought.

*"Alright. I'll be there soon."*

\*\*\*

*"An inquiry?"* Izuku questioned incredulously.

All Might nodded gravely. "Yes. One that you will probably be expected to attend."

Izuku's eyes widened almost impossibly, "All Might, this is... this is *insane*."

"I agree. But heroes are under even more scrutiny than usual, given the events over the past year and a half."

"And I get that, I *do*, but... *All Might* ..." he couldn't help tears of frustration prick at the corner of his eyes. "All Might, he *saved* me. He was so hurt; I'm honestly amazed he was still even able to realise I was in danger."

"I know."

"I could see she needed help and I did *try* but she just ended up stabbing me with a *katana* instead."

"I know."

“A *katana*!”

“I know.”

“Doesn’t that change anything?” he asked desperately.

“I’m not sure that part’s even been covered by the news.”

“You’re kidding!?”

“The truth doesn’t sell,” All Might reminded him gently. “They’ll do everything in their power to spin this in a way that suits them.”

“Then I’ll speak out!” Izuku practically shouted. “I’ll tell them what really happened!”

“My boy—“

“No! I will!” he insisted. “I’ll tell them what really happened, and they’ll *have* to drop it. None of this was Kacchan’s fault!”

“You’re not permitted to speak to the media.”

“*What!?*”

All Might sighed. “First of all...” Izuku looked like he was going to interrupt, but All Might held up a finger. “Listen, my boy. First of all: you’re still in a hospital bed. Secondly, young Bakugou was very close to being called up on a murder charge–“

“A *what!*?”

“A murder charge, yes I know. However, Principal Nezu stepped in and managed to swing a public inquiry instead: looking into the function of pro-Heroism, and the systems in place for people who are trapped within the cycle of addiction and poverty. Not to mention, the role, and accountability, of students under the instruction of Pro Agencies. It wouldn’t be appropriate for us to try to sway public opinion through the media until after these investigations, especially through the mouth of a teenager.”

“This is so... so *unfair!*”

All Might paused at this comment, looking at Izuku thoughtfully. Izuku felt his heart pounding in righteous irritation, and, for a moment, that was the only sound that filled his ears.

All Might seemed to mull over his words before finally voicing his thoughts.

“I’m not entirely sure it is unfair, young Midoriya.”

Izuku went to respond, but hesitation forced his mouth shut with a click as soon as it opened. A large part of him – the part that still emulated the heroes from his childhood and the people he admired today, Kacchan included, wanted to scream in indignation at the thought of his childhood friend being dragged through something so invasive. However, the tiny (but growing) ember of doubt flared just

enough to make itself known.

There was truth in All Might's words, as much as he didn't want to think about it.

He'd read the news; he'd read the interviews and he'd listened to the statements – it was one of the first things he did once he got his phone back.

Whilst the media articles were unsurprisingly sensationalist and biased against his friend, the statements from the advocacy groups and the vill... vic... *Asumi's* family still held an uncomfortable amount of truth.

On the other hand... *why* did it have to be Kacchan? He'd *saved* him and all of the other people at the scene. He *was* a hero.

It forced two sides of himself to confront each other viciously. *Painfully* . He wanted to save people – he *had* tried to save *Asumi*. But in that moment, *he* was a victim that needed saving and he *was* saved. By a hero. By Kacchan. It was an internal battle that was almost visceral in its antithesis and brutality.

*Whose side was he on?*

Another small but vicious ember rose from another part of his soul: guilt.

He sighed and dropped his head in defeat, all of the previous fight leaving him in an instant.

“This is my fault.”

“Young Midoriya...”

“No. It is,” he muttered forlornly, “I shouldn’t have tried to reason with her. I should have nullified her Quirk first – I put myself in danger which put Kacchan in an impossible position.”

All Might didn’t speak, but clearly took in Izuku’s words and turned them over in his mind.

He eventually replied, with a shadow of a small smile on his gaunt face.

“Of course you’ve replayed that battle a hundred times – that’s a good thing. It means that you’re learning from it and, if something like this happens again in the future, you’ll know what to do.” He sounded like he was trying to be reassuring. Izuku wasn’t reassured. “Besides, you weren’t responsible for this. Strictly speaking, the agency handling you are. Regardless, if there’s one thing I’ve learnt in my time as a hero, it’s to focus on how we can make things better now and in the future rather than obsessing over the past or finding someone to blame.”

Izuku drew up his knees and rested his head glumly upon them.

“It won’t change the fact that she died.”

All Might sighed sadly and placed a withered hand on Izuku’s arm.



“No,” he agreed quietly, “but the inquiry and some reflection will help stop this kind of thing from happening again, to all parties involved. Think of this as a way for us to work together with these advocacy groups to help rebuild a society with a brighter future.”

For a split second, Kacchan’s collapsed figure and frozen face crossed his mind. He *needed* to be back at the dorms. He *needed* to be in the loop.

Izuku sighed in frustration. “I *hate* this. And I *hate* that I’m stuck here.”

“I know.” All Might patted his arm. “The essence of being a hero is to stick your nose in when it’s not necessarily your business. I know you want to help your friend, but the way to do that is to get back to your full strength and speak honestly when the inquiry calls for it.”

“And what did Kacchan say about all this?”

All Might paused for a little too long.

“All Might?”

His mentor sighed and rested his chin on steepled hands that were supported by bony elbows balancing on skeletal knees.

“We haven’t told him yet.”

Izuku looked outraged for a flash before understanding crossed his

face. All Might could almost *hear* the cogs turning in his brain. “I knew it. He’s not taking what happened well is he?”

All Might kept his face neutral. “It’s not my place to discuss students’ wellbeing and health with other students...”

“But?”

“You don’t need to worry, young Midoriya. There are things in place to support, not just him, but anyone involved, yourself included, when you’re back at the dorms.” He smiled warmly at Izuku. “He’s in the best and safest place he could be right now.”

\*\*\*

He wasn’t even too sure what woke him up, but his heart was pounding.

Red eyes snapped open to a truly horrific sight.

Kirishima Eijirou’s drooling face mere inches from his own.

He tried to jerk away, horrified, but a hand circling his wrist stopped him in his tracks.

*Why did people keep touching him??*

He tried harder to pull away, but Kirishima simply tossed an arm over

his shoulder sleepily and pulled his head into his chest like he was a goddamn teddy bear. Katsuki stiffened in abject horror. *This couldn't be happening.*

“Just go with it, bro.” Kirishima mumbled sleepily before giving a loud, terrifying growl right into his ear ... wait, was that a snore? *Jesus Eijirou, see a fucking ENT.*

But as much as he squirmed, Kirishima held tight, and he begrudgingly - and very grumpily - found himself being lulled by the warmth very literally enveloping him and the steadying heartbeat thumping unwaveringly and comfortingly against his ear. His eyes started to roll shut no matter how much he valiantly tried to resist it with a frown until eventually, he couldn't do it anymore and he became a boneless pile of mush under the blankets as he fell back into a deep sleep.

The next time he woke up, his eyes blinked open as he gradually adjusted to the soft light breaking past the thin curtains of the bedroom window. Kirishima's side of the bed was empty and his blankets were cool, indicating he had left a little while before. Languidly, he rolled onto his back and blinked at the ceiling, waiting for sound to reach his brain. Or, more specifically, the sounds of ridicule, accusations, and hatred from his murder victim.

But there was none.

Besides the chirping of birds outside, the room was silent.

He risked peeking out of the corner of his eyes, without moving his head.

Asumi was gone.

He looked back at the ceiling, barely willing to move an inch in case it somehow shattered the first moment of peace in a week by triggering her re-appearance. He couldn't stay there forever though. For one thing, this wasn't his room and Kirishima, for some stupid reason, didn't have a clock. Well, strictly speaking, he did have an utterly *embarrassing* clock with 'manly' arms on the wall, but it had run out of batteries long ago and the idiot never got round to changing it, no matter how much Katsuki bitched about it *every single time* he entered his friend's room.

Frankly, he found it unsettling enough not to wake up in his own bed, let alone not knowing what time (or day?) it was. He kicked his feet a few times, pushing the duvet down. He hesitated before sitting up, just to make sure he was sure he wanted to risk waking Asumi. Eventually, he gritted his teeth and forced himself to sit up, using the momentum to plant his feet on the floor.

He paused again.

No Asumi.

So far, so good. And, honestly, he felt the most well-rested he had felt in a very long time.

Near-silently, he padded to the door and slipped into his own room, grabbing the phone on the thick headboard that doubled up as a ledge. He took a second to change into some cleaner lounge clothes as his current ones smelled like old sweat and still felt a little sticky, before letting himself back into Kirishima's room, and diving back under his duvet again.

He couldn't quite put his finger on it, but it just felt a little bit safer in

Kirishima's room than his own.

He checked the time, ignoring the hundreds of ignored messages on the 2-A group chat (and the 52 missed calls and twice as many texts from his parents...oops), and groaned. It was early afternoon. He had essentially lost almost 24 hours to sleeping, crying himself back to fucking sleep, and then sleeping again. His cheeks burned but again, his emotions seemed to be hindered. Like a wall blocking the extreme ends, his emotions seemed boxed into a very small square made up of four corners of 'apathy', 'numbness', 'mild irritation' and, now apparently, 'crying myself to sleep in someone else's bed'. Great. This wouldn't so easily be shoved in that dark box where unpleasant memories usually went.

He placed his phone on the ledge above the bed and slipped his head under the covers as his stomach rumbled.

He just didn't want to deal with any of it right now.

Luckily, Kirishima was apparently now a shining beacon of intelligence and, apparently, some form of a psychic, higher power because not even five minutes later, he was gently edging his door open with his back, balancing a tray of food and two cups of green tea.

Katsuki risked peeking out the folds of the duvet curiously, as the smell of miso soup and grilled vegetables hit his nose.

"If you want some, you're gonna need to stop hiding under there like a gremlin and grab a spoon."

Katsuki scowled instinctively at the teasing, shoving a hand out insistently as he sat up properly, leaning against the headboard.

Kirishima laughed at him and passed him a bowl of soup and a spoon, before hooking an ankle around his desk chair and making himself comfortable, cross-legged on it.

“Miso first – trust me, you’ve slept for *hours* , you’re gonna just want the soup first.”

“Did you make this?”

“Yep!”

That sounded far too proud.

“Oh shit, take it back while I finish my will first.”

“Hey!”

The banter between them felt nice, if a little flatter and less natural than usual. A companionable silence fell, broken only by Kirishima’s enthusiastic slurping. After a moment, he looked over at Bakugou, who was staring into his own bowl like it contained a particularly difficult puzzle he had to crack before he could swallow the contents and tapped it with his spoon. Katsuki jumped, nearly spilling soup onto the blankets.

“Oi!”

“You need to eat it before it eats you.”

“... the hell did you put in it?”

Kirishima gave him a weak smile before setting his own food aside and looking at him seriously, “Aizawa’ll be here soon.”

Katsuki groaned and threw his head back dramatically, “Ugh, you *told* him?”

“I did.”

“*What* did you tell him?”

Kirishima shifted his hip and grabbed his phone, unlocking it; he opened the text conversation with their teacher.

**Kirishima Eijirou [01:35]** : Sorry for the late message. You wanted me to keep you updated – he’s in my room, asleep now, but it was bad, sir. I didn’t know what to do. He woke up screaming, he was crying, he told me he could see the dead girl? Asumi? And that he didn’t mean to kill her. I’ve never seen him like that and I’m really worried about him. Anyway, he’s asleep now.

**Aizawa Shouta [ 01:36]**: Don’t worry, you didn’t disturb me. You did the right thing. Do you need me to come over?

**Kirishima Eijirou [01:36]**: Not yet. I don’t want to wake him up. Could you come in the morning?

**Aizawa Shota [01:37]:** Text me when he's awake. Call me if you need anything beforehand. As scary as I know that must have been, believe it or not, it's probably helped him to start to talk about it. You did well.

**Kirishima Eijirou [01:37]:** :/ thank you, sir.

He wasn't going to repeat the conversation verbatim, so he paraphrased.

"Just that you were with me in case he noticed your room was empty and that you were... uh... upset."

"For *fuck's sake*, Kirish—"

"It was the right thing to do, man. I'm not gonna apologise for that."

Katsuki didn't reply, glaring back into his still untouched bowl as he tried to calm his racing heart. *Do they let crazy people become heroes now? What about weaklings who can't even handle a bit of blood? Are you gonna cry and break down every time someone gets hurt? Fuck fuck fuck fuck...*

"Fuck!"

It took every inch of willpower not to launch his soup at the wall.

Kirishima was looking at him softly. It was unbearable.



“You need help, Bakugou.”

Katsuki bared his teeth, “I don’t need help. I’m not crazy. I’m not *weak*.”

Kirishima looked concerned, “No one’s saying you are,” he countered, still with that unbearable tone of empathy and understanding. “I know I’d be a *mess* in your shoes. You can’t expect to carry this by yourself, and,” he paused hesitantly. “ I might make things worse if I try to help by myself.”

*“I don’t need your help.”*

“What if I actually *was* in your shoes, huh?” he countered, “What if it was *me* and I was waking up screaming and not sleeping or eating and came to you saying all these things and... if I came to you the way you came to me?”

“I’d tell you to grow the fuck up.”

Kirishima shook his head, “I don’t think you would.”

Katsuki reverted to silence as his response. Kirishima sighed.

“Eat your soup. Please?”

“Don’t tell me what to do.”

The silence that encroached the room was far less companionable and comfortable as it had been before, like when they used to hang out, either catching up on homework or playing video games or messing around on their phones in each other's company. Sadness brimmed in Kirishima's heart the more he thought about it, so he looked back at his phone for something to do.

“Oh hey!” he voiced in surprise, momentarily forgetting Bakugou’s new vow of awkward silence. “Midoriya’s messaged the group.”

Bakugou seemed to freeze up even more at this, before he pushed his bowl onto the ledge over the bed and picked up his phone like he was picking up a particularly poisonous and angry spider by its hairy leg.

He opened the chat.

Seen by: Jack, Alien Kweeeeen, Shouto, ☆ Sparkles ☆ , Yaomomo, Infinity Girl, Jamming-Whey (꒰꒱꒰) , Snow White, Tenta-Cool, Lil' Perv, Invisi-Queen, Dad Joke, Sugar Sugar, Tails, Froppy-Chan, Budget Spiderman, Kiri (•vv•) and Lord Explosion Murder.

*Lord Explosion Murder.*

Lord Explosion Murder.

He locked his phone immediately, feeling the familiar sensation of nausea jump to his throat. He breathed in harshly through his nose, trying to dispel it.

“You alright?”

Katsuki dutifully ignored him.

Their phones pinged simultaneously.

To: Kiri(•vv•) and *Lord Explosion Murder*

*Dekuuuuuuu: Hey*

Before he could spiral into his growing panic any further, a knock on the door shattered the tension around them. Aizawa haunted the doorway, his expression neutral and open, clear of the limp hair that usually hid it. He wore it in a low bun, and he was in what counted as casual wear for their teacher which could still only be described as black, baggy and non-descript, only lacking his signature capture scarf. The only other time Katsuki had seen his teacher look like this was when he was tying him up with said scarf and sentencing him to house arrest and chores. *Great.*

“Bakugou,” he intoned in greeting. “We can talk here or in my office.”

There was clearly no alternative option, but he tried his luck anyway.

“I think I’ll pass,” he growled.

“Don't be difficult.”

*Dammit.*

Well, there was no way in hell he was going to endure this humiliation wearing sweatpants and hiding under a duvet.

“Your office then.”

“You have ten minutes.”

He walked away.

The man truly had such an inspirationally eloquent way with words.

Kirishima looked at him a little tentatively as he flung back the duvet and got to his feet to storm towards the door.

“Do you...” Katsuki paused at the uncharacteristically hesitant voice behind him, “Do you want me to come with you?”

To his credit, Katsuki did take a moment to ponder the question. Did he want the other boy there? As... what? A buffer? To help answer questions? As... gag... emotional support?

He wasn't actually too sure of his answer.

Did he even deserve the option?

“No ,” hissed a treacherous voice in his head that sounded suspiciously like Asumi.

“Bakugou-?”

“Shut up, I'm thinking.”

“I could wait outside the door?”

That sounded comforting. Reassuring, though he would never admit that under any circumstances whatsoever, so he shrugged.

“If you want.”

He didn't look back once.

With that, he stalked to his own room to shove on a pair of jeans so he looked at least a little less pathetic and bedraggled. He half-heartedly ran a hand through his hair to tame it a little before perching on the end of his mattress.

He stared at his phone.

To: Kiri (•̀v•́) and *Lord Explosion Murder*

*Dekuuuuuuu:* **Hey**

*“Lord Explosion Murder,”* his brain spat, again sounding remarkably like Asumi though, luckily, she didn’t perform her grotesque routine in front of him this time. Small mercies.

*“Just who the fuck do you think you are?”* That sounded more like his own inner voice this time.

Before he could give it too much thought, he impulsively tapped his thumb on the settings menu and deleted that stupid nickname. He closed the box and the screen name defaulted to *‘Bakugou’*. He went back to the message and stared at it for a second longer.

To: Kiri (•v•) and *Bakugou*

*Dekuuuuuuu:* **Hey**

*[Lord Explosion Murder has changed his name to Bakugou]*

He sighed and removed himself from the conversation. Then the 2-A chat. Then he deleted the chat app altogether.

He was probably about to become an ex-member of the Heroics course anyway so why waste time?

He chucked his phone back onto his bed where it bounced with a muted thump and braced himself as he headed down to Aizawa’s office.

*[Bakugou has left the chat]*

## Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! If you get a chance to leave any sort of feedback, that would be really appreciated. A) I get a much-needed dopamine hit every time I read them! and B) I would love to know what I can do to improve your reading experience.

Thank you so much again for reading and sticking with me! I really appreciate your time! :D

# Chapter 8

## Chapter Notes

Uh oh, that chapter count just getting longer hahaha oops

Thank you everyone who has subscribed, commented or left kudos. It honestly gives me such a thrill and means the world so thank you!!

Thank you as well, as always, to applecider18 who is just insanely good at noticing or pulling out nuances, discussing ideas with me, editing my shoddy punctuation and grammar, and just generally being a good egg all round. Thank you as always for your time and invaluable help - it's so much more fun writing with you!

“Bakugou!”

A cheerful voice stopped him in his already-reluctant tracks. He felt Kirishima stop next to him curiously as Uraraka came towards him, still dressed in sleep shorts and a dusty pink oversized hoodie, with a large, wrapped square in her hands. She could clearly sense the tension in the air and kept her distance, giving him an escape route should he need it, though her face remained determinedly assertive. She was clearly on a personal mission of some sort.

“Have you got a minute?”

Well, a minute here was a minute *not* getting expelled and not being spoken to as if he was about to break into a million pieces. Her casual demeanour was a breath of fresh air, if he were being honest, so he'd allow her this.

“Sure.” He said shortly, shoving his hands in his pockets.



“Well,” she shifted the package in her hands, using a bent knee to help her balance it as she slipped it from its protective wrapper, “I’ve mostly finished Deku’s gift. All Might is stopping back here tonight so I was going to give it to him then to take back tomorrow but it didn’t seem right to put your name on something you hadn’t approved, so, here.”

She passed it to him.

He took it gingerly.

It was...

“... a scrapbook?” he questioned flatly. That was... Was this the kind of gift ‘Bakugou the friend’ would give?

He gave Uraraka a quick sceptical look before studying the monstrosity in his hands. The pages were bound on either side by a thick, dark green cover, tied together with a stupidly delicate little white bow that he pulled open in one move. The ribbon felt too tiny and fragile between his large fingers.

Inside, the pages were full of colour, handwritten notes, and photos. The first page consisted of a general Class 2-A double-page spread with photos from the class hanging out as a group both in the dorms and outside of school: a group photo in their uniforms on the last day before winter break, one at the arcade on a rare evening out (with Mr. Aizawa hiding in his sleeping bag somewhere in the background begrudgingly stuck on chaperone duty), another in their gym clothes before the Sports Festival, and a few smaller ones of individuals and small groups.

Horns cheering while Pikachu gave her a piggyback ride.

Bird Brain, Dunc-Face again, Ears, himself, and Ponytail during a band rehearsal.

Two of the extras, Rock Face and Tentacles, covered in butterflies while waiting for their turn during a practical lesson.

Half n' Half clearly dragged into a selfie with Deku, Round-Face and Glasses, looking very uncertain but mildly pleased in the middle of the three of them grinning wildly and flashing peace signs around him.

The gaps were filled in with scrawled get well notes from every member of the group, other than himself; doodles; small pieces of origami messily glued onto the paper; and a truly abhorrent amount of glitter.

Katsuki was loath to admit it. It was one of the worst things he had ever laid eyes on... and Deku would *absolutely love it*.

He would probably cry with happiness like the over-emotional sap he was.

Feeling his fingers already getting tacky with glue and glitter, he flipped a few pages ahead and landed on a section dedicated to the so-called 'Dekusquad' across four pages. It was *smothered* in more photos and longer handwritten notes he couldn't bring himself to read. Pictures of them hanging out in the common room, in each other's rooms, at the beach, at the movie theatre... even one of the five of them piled practically on top of each other on what he recognised as the sofa in Deku's mom's living room. Deku himself was beaming in the middle of the pile, absolutely surrounded by – and glowing with – love and happiness.

He felt his heart twist.

He flipped the tacky page again and stopped when he saw his own name.

To Uraraka's credit, she had done a decent job with the little she had been given to work with. Again, it was a double spread page, but far more sparsely decorated than the rest of the pages, and notably so. Even fucking Invisigirl had managed to feature more heavily on her own and the 2-A pages and she was literally, well... invisible.

He had known the other boy for nearly 18 years.

And an entire *lifetime* was summed up, in Uraraka's eyes, across three photos.

A candid one taken of the two of them violently thrashing each other on Mario Kart in the semi-final of a class-wide tournament on the living room T.V. that he hadn't even realised had been taken. One of him pointing and cackling hysterically at Deku's ridiculously poofy hair after a match of 'Catch-A-Kacchan.' And the final one was a group shot of himself, begrudgingly, with the rest of his friend group: Kirishima had hooked the nerd behind his neck and dragged him into the selfie Ashido was taking of them all at the last minute. Deku's cheeks were flushed and bashful, but he still looked like he had caught the sunshine in his teeth, so wide and pleased was his smile.

The rest was strikingly empty: no thoughtful handwritten message, no cheerful little doodles. It was just... blank.

His heart twisted further into his mouth, and he closed the book with a thump. He practically shoved it back into Uraraka's hands.

“He’ll love it,” he muttered.

Pink Cheeks’ face lit up like a constellation. "You think so?"

Well, he couldn’t let her head get too big, lest she float off into space with that stupid Quirk of hers.

“It’s not finished, though.”

Her brow furrowed. “What do you mean?”

The door to Aizawa’s dorm office swung open, just as he brought himself to look into her big, uncertain eyes.

“I’ll come back for it,” he told her, before entering the office without a word, leaving Kirishima and Uraraka blinking in confusion in his wake.

Aizawa nodded at the two of them in greeting, before closing the door behind him.

Uraraka remained standing awkwardly, looking at Kirishima for some kind of Bakugou-to-Japanese translation. He shrugged at her, before sitting against the wall directly outside the room his friend had disappeared into, settling himself in for the wait.

“I guess I’ll leave this here for him then?” she asked, placing the

scrapbook on the dining table.

Kirishima flashed a smile at her and unlocked his phone, “I’ll let him know it’s there. Thanks, Uraraka.”

She gifted a small smile back, before making her way back upstairs, shuffling in her slippers with her hands in her pockets.

Kirishima turned his attention to his phone.

To: Kiri (•̀v•́)

*Dekuuuuuuu: Hey*

*[Lord Explosion Murder has changed his name to Bakugou]*

*[Bakugou has left the chat].*

*Dekuuuuuuu: Please tell me what’s going on.*

He sighed and thumped his head back onto the wall he was leaning against with a soft *whump*.

He felt for Midoriya, he really did, but he just didn’t even know what to tell him at this point. How much of it was his place? How much would change after Aizawa and Bakugou had finished their conversation?

His phone screen darkened with lack of use, so he re-unlocked it and finally settled on a reply.

**Kiri (•\_•) : sry dude, not ignoring you. just super busy atm – promise 2 catch up with you later**

Technically, it wasn't a lie. He just needed time to figure out what to say.

\*\*\*

“Let me start out by saying that *you're not in trouble* .”

That was an interesting way to start the expulsion conversation– Aizawa wasn't usually the type to sugarcoat things like this, though in fairness to him, the last time he threatened to immediately expel someone was when he had only known his class for a few seconds. Perhaps he was growing soft. Katsuki even dared to believe for a second that maybe, just maybe, his teacher *didn't* want to expel him (though of course, he had to) and was going to let him down gently.

Katsuki simply looked at him warily, refusing to relax his tensed shoulders and fists.

He wasn't going to lose the last bit of control he had– if Aizawa wanted to drag it out, he would have to fight for that privilege.

“You're not gonna expel me?”

That seemed to catch Aizawa off-guard, which was an achievement not many people could boast of accomplishing. He stared at him in surprised silence for a beat before blinking and pulling himself together with a confused frown.

“What?”

Katsuki felt a sick wave of an emotion that felt so uncannily close to *satisfaction* that he'd managed to actually surprise the underground hero. He wouldn't be underestimated– he knew what was going on and what the school needed to do.

He didn't need to be pitied. He didn't need to be shown kindness.

He had forfeited that right when he committed his crime.

At the memory of Asumi's shining face basking in the glow of his detonations, he felt the righteous and adrenaline coursing through him after calling his teacher's bluff immediately dissipate.

Katsuki finally slumped down in the seat facing his teacher that he had initially refused, suddenly losing any energy he had regained after finally getting a whole night's sleep. He lifted one leg up to hold his knee and leaned as far back into the backrest of the office chair as he possibly could, pretty much wishing he could just disappear into the grey foam.

“I murdered someone. Dragged U.A.'s name down with me. I'm losing my goddamn mind – even *you* want me to see a shrink.” He scowled at the floor and refused to meet his teacher's eyes. “This is meant to be a course for heroes and I'm no hero, so just get it over with. Kick me out.”

“Kid–”

Katsuki felt a surge of angry adrenaline re-appear and hit him out of exactly nowhere and he threw his feet down as he launched himself fully upright. It was the strongest emotion he had felt in over a week and was almost dizzying in its intensity. Before he knew it, his hands had flung out to grab the chair he had just left. He launched it across the room in a burst of hysterical strength and it bounced off the wall with a sickening crash, taking a chunk of blue paint with it. Aizawa didn't even flinch.

“Stop dragging it out, dammit! I know that Kirishima told you I'm going crazy – seeing her, hearing things. I can't sleep, I can't eat, I can't even use my fucking *Quirk* anymore! So, what's the point in dragging this shit out?” he raged, practically spitting in his fury. His heart raced so severely, throwing itself against his ribcage so hard, it felt like he was being punched. He shoved his hands into his hair and gripped the strands tightly, trying to stop the shaking that encompassed his entire body, but it was futile. “Heroes can't be crazy. Heroes can't not train. Heroes can't– they can't be fucking *murderers*.”

Off flew whatever was unfortunate enough to be on Aizawa's desk in front of him as he barrelled a furious arm through anything he could make contact with.

“Heroes are meant to save people! Deku never stopped trying to help her and if I had just fucking *seen* that and *helped* him, she wouldn't be dead and he wouldn't be–”

“Bakugou. Let's take a walk.”

The sudden change in topic, combined with Aizawa's calm tone in the



face of his aggression, shocked him out of his ranting. He stopped almost immediately, and he slowly turned his head to look his teacher in his remaining eye.

“What?”

“Let’s get some air, somewhere more private than last time.”

Katsuki blinked and gestured vaguely at the ground zero that was once his teacher’s dorm office. Aizawa looked at the mess dismissively.

“You can clear that up later,” he said before opening a backdoor that led to the small section of courtyard that separated 2-A’s dorm from the neighbouring building. It was as immaculately cared for as the rest of the UA grounds, though admittedly more concealed. In both his years of living in the dorms, Katsuki realised he had never once thought to walk or train there.

Aizawa stood expectantly by the open door, until Katsuki followed with a huff and stormed outside, his hands shoved into his pockets, furred into tight fists to ignore their trembling. His teacher followed close behind him.

They walked side-by-side for a moment in the breeze before coming to a natural stop.

“You’re not wrong, Bakugou. Heroes *are* meant to help people,” Aizawa finally voiced.

He felt his soul seize and twist. *Here it comes .*

“I wanted this kind of thing to be covered in the first-year curriculum, to be honest,” Aizawa continued, “especially as your quirks are a part of you. A powerful and potentially dangerous part of you that you are inherently accountable for. Everyone in your class has that exact same responsibility.”

*“You’re a murderer. Even your teacher thinks you’re a monster.”* Asumi, it seemed, had followed them out the door too – the courtyard was not as private as his teacher may have hoped.

Katsuki swallowed around an uncomfortable lump that had materialised in his throat. “Yeah, like Animal Guy could blast someone’s head off with his bare hands,” he snapped, hoping the waspishness in his tone carried across his usual arrogance, rather than an obvious emotional spiral he had been engaging in for the last few days. But his... *episode* in Aizawa's office had left him unbalanced and had thoroughly nulled any attempt at standoffishness.

Aizawa raised an eyebrow.

“You don’t think Kouda’s Quirk could be potentially dangerous?” he questioned, looking genuinely interested in his student’s response. He rested his arm against the half-wall lining the path that they had stopped on and leaned back, tilting his head. Asumi sat folded over on the wall, once again twirling her long, crooked fingers in Aizawa’s scarf. “What about Jirou? Or Uraraka?”

“Who?”

“Don’t avoid the question.”

Katsuki huffed and shrugged his shoulders, also choosing to lean against the wall so that any stupid extras who might walk past would think he was just having a casual conversation with his homeroom teacher about homework or other menial shit like that, rather than a discussion hurtling worryingly close to the topic of his... feelings. Asumi's legs dangled as she watched the conversation with wide, eager eyes.

"I mean, I guess," he granted. "Animal Guy could summon an army of... I don't fucking know... scorpions. Ears could knock a wall onto someone with her heartbeat and Round Face could blast them into space or drop a building on them. They'd have to be really fucking stupid to manage that though."

Aizawa's expression didn't move at that – Katsuki had been expecting annoyance or a rebuttal that didn't come.

"Or, they could make a mistake."

Katsuki blinked.

"A mistake?"

He blinked again.

"Students are supposed to make them – it's quite literally what you come to school for."

"The shit I did? You can't *fix* that!" Katsuki retorted, his voice pitching up with incredulity. He felt another bubble of hysteria peel up from somewhere deep within him, "A mistake should be swapping a

preposition in English or... or fucking up an equation on the last number. Not...”

Something within him suddenly clammed up and he closed his mouth with a click, looking anywhere but his teacher.

There was a pause, punctuated by the light breeze that swept through the grass around them. Asumi swang her bare feet as the wind tickled her toes and her hair tousled with the movement. She looked awfully young.

It was then that Katsuki, with an agonising swell of realisation that grazed his heart, realised that he had really, really fucked up and he couldn’t take it back. He couldn’t help but verbalise as such to his teacher before immediately kicking himself and returning to his silent staring.

“I killed that girl. I *killed* her,” he gasped, “I really, *really* fucked up.”

“You did.” Aizawa agreed.

Asumi whipped her head up at him, a gleeful grin dripping down her face like a leaking sack of sin oozing over her innocent face, “A *victim* and a *villain*!”

“But so did Midoriya.”

...

*What?*

Asumi looked just as bemused, with a dangerous look in her eyes.

“And so did U.A. There are things we need to do better.” It was as if his teacher was coming to his own realisation. “You’re in school to make mistakes, but those mistakes shouldn’t lead to something like this.”

His shattered mind completely unable to keep up, Bakugou simply turned away from him, leaning against the wall behind him with his head in his hands, intent on blocking out everything around him. It was too much to process.

“From what you and Midoriya have reported, you tried to subdue her and capture her with your cuffs – it was reasonable of you to expect that Midoriya would do the same and work with you to achieve that goal.”

*“Wait!” Deku blurted out, a little too loudly; clearly, his hearing was still suffering, “We need to plan this out. We can’t just–”*

“He got close enough to apprehend her or at least distract her enough to give you an opening, then paused and tried to verbally request her to stop, which caught you off-guard.”

*“You don’t have to do this!” he tried to reason, dodging again as she repeated her attack.*

*Katsuki glared at him, aghast, “What the hell are you doing, Deku?” he launched himself towards her like a grenade, “Just take her down*

*already!”*

“Protocol – and, frankly, common sense – would dictate that you nullify the threat: her Quirk in this case, as that was her main defence and offence. You both said she wasn’t a skilled swordsman and would easily have had her weapon removed from her person once the Quirk was out of the way.

“Midoriya made a mistake which ultimately put himself, you, and the unarmed bystanders and downed pros he should have been prioritising over Asumi at that moment, in danger.”

Katsuki blinked into the darkness of his hands as he took this in.

“This set off the chain of events that ended up in quite serious injuries for the pair of you and, in the girl’s – Asumi’s – case, a death that could have been avoided.”

Katsuki could feel the humidity from his breath bouncing back off his hands and making his face damp. It felt cold.

“You also made a mistake.”

Numbness began to creep over him.

“You need to learn to communicate and plan before throwing yourself headfirst into battle. But, most importantly, you know full well that unless you can see exactly what you’re aiming for, you don’t use your Quirk – especially not at full power. You were concussed and you panicked, but pros can’t afford to do that.”

His cold breath was starting to catch painfully in his throat.

“However.” Something in Aizawa’s tone shifted which caused Katsuki to peer up at him through parted fingers. “You’re not pros yet.”

A new sensation flooded his chest – he wasn’t even sure what emotion it was anymore.

“You’re *students*. You’re in school to make mistakes. I want you to mess up; it’s how you learn. You’re just incredibly unlucky that your mistakes had such serious consequences.”

His gaze fell back down again, and that black emotion continued filling his lungs, drowning him.

“The fact that you’re reflecting on this is a good thing, Bakugou.”

Katsuki scoffed, but there was neither humour nor malice behind it. “It doesn’t feel like a good thing.”

“No. Because you’re a child. You’re not equipped to handle things like this – hell, most pros would be struggling, same as you, which is why you need to let others help you and why the adults responsible for you need to look at their own practices – U.A. and Fallacy’s agency included.

“Being a reflective practitioner is no weakness – it’s a strength. It will make you better. It will make *others* better. But you can’t let it overcome you. You may need time to accept what’s happened –

months even; I'd be concerned if it didn't continue to affect you for at least a few weeks yet.

"But, that's why you need to let others in so that it shapes you without drowning you."

It was an impressive speech – one that Katsuki could feel valiantly attempting to chisel away at the dark barrier that had been thrown up between himself and Aizawa as he spoke.

Katsuki swallowed around a dry throat before trying a classic deflection. "Speaking from experience, sir?"

Aizawa allowed a mild smile in response, though not a single hint of it reached his eye. "Unfortunately."

"I already agreed to see your shrink," he argued half-heartedly.

"You did," he conceded, "but we can't help what we don't know about. Hallucinations for example? That needed to be something I knew about immediately, if not for your own wellbeing, but that of those around you."

*Damn shitty-haired traitor...*

"I've got it under control," he growled defensively. "I wasn't going to hurt any–"

"There's no way I would have let you spar if I had known you were



compromised in that way. You could have put Ashido in danger.”

*She looked down at him in shock, her mouth hanging open in absolute betrayal as blood spilt from her charred mouth.*

*“Blasty?” she whimpered. He looked back at her in despair. The explosion had ripped a hole through her stomach.*

“If anything, I couldn’t hurt her.”

“You couldn’t save her either when she was relying on you.”

*Katsuki immediately dropped Ashido’s hand and placed his own palm between them and the hunk of concrete hurtling towards them, planning to simply blast it into harmless gravel.*

*Nothing happened.*

*Ashido screamed.*

He couldn’t argue against that. He felt a hot vat of unease and humiliation pool in the bottom of his stomach at the reminder of his complete impotence during their training session.

“Your hands too - you may not have hurt Ashido, but I also won’t allow you to hurt yourself.”

Katsuki stared. How did he...?

Despite the fact that Shitty-Hair and their teacher were suddenly conspiring behind his back, he knew for a fact that he'd never breathed a word about what happened in the gym to anyone... except...

*Eyebags. Fuck. Though, of all the people in the world, he didn't expect that purple-haired asshole to be the one to rat him out.*

Goddammit, was *everyone* going around gossiping about him now?

You're expelling me, aren't you."

The statement tumbled out of his lips like volcanic ash at the start of a particularly violent eruption before he even had the sense to hold it in or wait for his teacher to *get to the fucking point already*.

Aizawa looked at him steadily.

"Do you think you should be expelled?"

He wasn't expecting the question to be pitched back to him. Yet another ball in his court that he didn't want and was, at this point, ready to blast into fucking space.

He realised, belatedly, that Aizawa was actually expecting an answer. He had leaned back to study him. Katsuki immediately felt his skin crawl with the acute intensity of being pulled apart and understood by someone else in a way that only Deku had managed to make him feel before. He looked away.

Fuck this. He didn't want the ball. He didn't even want to be in the court. He decided to throw his racket to the ground with a force that bent it and sent it flying dangerously into a crowd filled with journalists, his classmates, his teachers and a thousand judgemental Asumi's, intent on watching and adjudicating his every move.

Seeing Katsuki clearly struggling to answer the question, Aizawa switched tactics.

"I'll rephrase," he said, without an ounce of impatience or annoyance, "do you think that a student who makes a mistake and clearly feels remorse would be better off fending for themselves out in the world rather than within the walls of a school that could help them make better decisions in the future?"

*Damn him.*

"... No."

"But?"

Katsuki considered. His answer clearly had an unspoken discourse marker that needed to be unpicked. Any good teacher would encourage his student to expand on their answer and express their thoughts that were blatantly unfinished. But what *did* he think should happen?

"I'm still a murderer," he eventually intoned tiredly like a broken fucking record, "so I should go to prison. That's what happens to villains – just because I'm a hero student, or a few months off eighteen... it doesn't make me special. I'm not a damn exception to the law."

Aizawa looked troubled but unsurprised at his response. However, there was something a little deeper under his expression that Katsuki was, frankly, too strung out to try and read at this point. There was more to this than his teacher was letting on.

“I wouldn’t call you a murderer, Bakugou.”

Asumi’s eyes flashed dangerously. Katsuki had to pause to process what he had just heard... and to his surprise, felt a very small part of him unwind a little at his teacher’s words. Aizawa Shouta: the hero, the teacher even he could admit had earned an awful lot of his respect, someone with the highest expectations of anyone he had ever met... didn’t think he was a villain?

Asumi shot off the wall behind Aizawa, her black eyes turning into a liquid fire that dripped down her face dismally and stained her cheeks. “No!” she screamed, storming forward.

Katsuki couldn’t help a small flicker of his eyes towards her as she demanded his attention and, with even just a glance, there was no hiding his movement from Eraserhead.

He looked behind him, then back to his student again.

“Is she here now?”

“I’m not crazy,” Katsuki insisted with a bite of anger, refusing to meet Aizawa’s gaze.

His stare remained steady, “I never said you were.”

Katsuki gritted his teeth, “No I really mean it. I’m not crazy,” he repeated. “Like, I *know* she’s not really there... but she just won’t go away. She’s like my brain’s just speaking out loud or...” he’d said too much, and his cheeks reddened furiously, “or... whatever.”

Aizawa rubbed his hand across his stubble, maintaining his neutral disposition. “Look, I’m not going to lie to you, kid. I’m no expert in this kind of thing – that’s what we’re paying Hound Dog for – but we’ll figure it out.” He sighed, “you’d probably be surprised how many pro-heroes find themselves needing some sort of mental help at more than one point in their careers.”

Katsuki shrugged uncomfortably, not liking the phrase ‘mental help’. The whole conversation was making him uneasy. Asumi had since shrunk back into the background but still glared at him with her horrifying eyes.

As if sensing the fact that his student was clearly shutting down in front of him again, Aizawa steered the conversation away.

“To answer your question, you won’t be expelled, and neither will you be arrested.”

Katsuki opened his mouth to argue. Surely, he deserved some sort of punishment? Aizawa held up his hand to halt his interruption.

“There will, however, be an inquiry.”

“A... *what?*”

“An inquiry is when...”

*“I know what an inquiry is.”*

Aizawa’s mouth tilted into a shadow of a smile at his indignation.

“It’s being arranged by Principal Nezu, Detective Tsukauchi, and the advocacy groups as we speak.”

Katsuki nodded, his mind racing in a way that was disgustingly similar to how he knew Deku’s brain worked when he was onto something. He wasn’t considered a prodigy for nothing – he just didn’t mutter creepily about it. It was clear that Asumi’s supporters had been vying for some sort of justice, most likely in the form of a murder charge; Principal Nezu, being the slightly shady but brilliant character he was, had obviously managed to arrange this as a compromise. It would make more sense, a rational part of his brain considered, to not only assign blame, but to put systems in place to stop this from happening again in future, too.

He did have some questions, however.

“And if the inquiry blames me?”

Aizawa huffed, “It won’t.”

“But if it *does*?”

“Then we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.”

Katsuki nodded, pointedly ignoring Asumi who was currently starting to melt in chunks into the grass.

“... and if the inquiry says it’s not my fault?”

Aizawa was silent for a second before responding, clearly choosing his words carefully, though they didn’t turn out to be too far off what Katsuki had expected.

“The best-case-scenario is that something gets put into place to stop people from falling through the cracks like Asumi did. That would be the logical outcome.”

Katsuki couldn’t help wincing in anticipation before he forced the next question out through his teeth: “And the worst-case scenario?”

“Pro-heroism basically collapses.”

*Shit.*

Silence reigned the air, Aizawa’s words hanging in the breeze.

“So not only am I to blame for the fall of All Might, but I could also be to blame for the fall of all the other heroes?”

“None of this is your fault.”

Katsuki scoffed. “Right.”

“I’m serious – something like this was always going to happen. I’m just sorry it involved you.”

Katsuki couldn’t taste even a hint of insincerity in his teacher’s tone.

“We’ll help you prepare for it – one of us teachers will be right alongside you. Midoriya should be present as well, considering he was just as involved as you, along with Fallacy, Thermostat, Kirishima, and Violet Crush.”

The vice suppressing Katsuki’s emotions was steadily tightening, creating a quiet sense of dread around his head and his heart.

*This was real. This was happening.*

“For now though... you need to look after yourself. This won’t start straight away – your first appointment with Hound Dog is tomorrow. Get some sleep, eat some proper food and *for God’s sake, would you please ring your mother .*”

Katsuki started at the sudden turn of conversation and tone and caught a glimpse of his mother’s upside-down name on Aizawa’s phone as he lifted it out of his pocket to reject a call that had lit the screen up. Never before had his teacher sounded quite so exasperated and that was saying something – Bakugou Mitsuki had that effect on people. He knew that firsthand.



“What does the old hag want?”

“To speak to her son. Please call her before she follows through on her threat to – what was it? – *‘climb up those stupid-ass walls with my bare hands’* and causes a scene with the media parked outside, please?”

Katsuki snorted. That sounded about right – he could understand Aizawa’s concern. Bakugou Mitsuki didn’t make threats she didn’t intend to follow through on.

“*Fine*, I’ll call her.”

“Thank you. Then, you’ll...?”

“Sleep. Eat something. See the shrink.”

“Good.”

There was a comfortable pause. Katsuki pushed himself off the wall with his foot, his mind swimming and overloaded.

“Can I go now?” he growled.

“You’re free to leave if you feel up to it,” Aizawa nodded, “take some time to process all of what we’ve talked about – it was a lot.”

Katsuki made a beeline for the door, once again pushed by his rampant flight response, but just before he could open it, Aizawa’s

hand appeared on his shoulder and stopped him.

“A year ago, this would have been a very different conversation. In fact, there wouldn’t have even *been* much of a discussion. You’ve grown and, regardless of any mistakes you might have made, I’m proud of you.

“Just remember that you can’t change what’s in the past, but you *can* control how you move forward. Think about things you can do right now that are within your control and that you *can* make better.”

His hand left as quickly as it had landed and almost made Bakugou second-guess as to whether he had even been touched in the first place, or if it was just another figment of his imagination.

He didn’t say anything, but he felt an unfamiliar swell bloom in his stomach and blossom warmly all the way to his chest as he shut the door behind him.

Silently, he took in the damage to the room he had caused a few minutes earlier, remembering with a grimace that Kirishima had probably heard every word he had practically screamed at Aizawa whilst destroying his office around him. Well, this was something he could make better, he supposed. With an aggravated sigh, he kneeled next to the closest pile of papers, photo frames, and folders that he had swept off the table and set them in a pile on the desk.

Once everything on the floor was moved to the table and the chair had been righted, he set about organising it all into some semblance of order. There was no doubt in his mind that his teacher would simply wait as long as he needed to re-enter the room *after* Katsuki had righted it.

With a detached sense of calm, he ensured piles of marking were organised by class, notebooks were in a place that made sense, and pens were returned to a pencil pot that now had a small crack in the side. The last things left were the photo frames.

One simply held a picture of a very serious-looking white cat with a Christmas-themed bowtie attached to the front of its collar.

*Fascinating.*

That went towards the back of his desk.

The second held a picture of two older people he didn't recognise – siblings maybe? An old picture of his parents? He wasn't entirely sure, but he placed it in a slightly more forward position.

The final was clearly of Aizawa when he was around Katsuki's age, looking as sour as ever and glaring at the floor in protest of the camera being shoved in his face by someone (who looked suspiciously like a teenage Present Mic) taking a group selfie. The third boy stood in between the two of them, but his face was unfamiliar. He smiled so wildly that his eyes were crinkled shut and his arm was around Aizawa as if reassuring him. He had a plaster over his nose and sky-blue hair. All three wore U.A. uniforms.

Aizawa clearly valued this photo: the frame was more expensive than the others and the glass recently polished. Something deep in his heart twinged, as if he had discovered something intensely personal, and he felt an odd sense of guilt for having thrown this particular memento on the floor.

This one was carefully placed at the front of the collection of pictures. As it tapped against the desk, a corner of a smaller photo peeked out

of the frame. It had been pushed between the glass and the wood by the force of the throw. He frowned and teased it out of the gap with a gentle finger and felt his heart catch as he realised what he was looking at.

Midnight. Her obituary photo.

A rogue part of his brain impulsively questioned that if Asumi had survived in place of Deku, would *he* have ended up in his 30's with a collection of dead faces on his desk as the only proof that his friends had ever existed?

He adjusted the photo so it sat neatly and securely tucked against the frame, wiping away a speck of dust that had appeared on the rim of her sharp glasses.

He looked at it for a second longer, before giving the rest of the office a quick glance to ensure everything was back in its proper place and stalking to the door. He yanked it open. Kirishima nearly tumbled straight into him.

“What the fuck, were you trying to listen?” Katsuki practically bellowed at him as he shoved his friend upright with two hands on his shoulders.

“No, I swear!” Kirishima held his hands out in defence, looking extremely apologetic, “honestly man, I just heard a huge crash and then you were both silent for ages – I was literally about to come in to make sure you were okay!”

“... Tch.”

He supposed that was fair enough, really. His little temper tantrum *must* have sounded pretty fucking horrendous from an outside perspective.

“I dropped something,” he lied shortly, before stomping past his friend and making his way into the (blessedly empty) common area.

“Geez,” Kirishima commented, trailing along behind him, “Did you drop the whole office?”

Katsuki threw a scowl over his shoulder, “Shut up.”

His mind glimpsed back to the photo on Aizawa’s desk.

“Actually, before you do that, where did Pink Cheeks leave that book?”

“Oh, the gift for Midoriya?” Kirishima moved past him and picked up the nauseating monstrosity to pass to him with no small amount of hesitation. “What are you going to do to it?” he reluctantly asked as he did so.

Katsuki’s scowl deepened; he could literally *feel* the indentation marks being left by his brows. “What the fuck do you mean *what am I going to do to it* ? I’m going to finish it, moron. Where’s the glue?”

Kirishima wordlessly passed him a glue stick and some tape that had been left on the coffee table, practically gaping at him in shock.

“I’ll be in my room. If anyone comes in, I’ll bla...” he stopped himself as his heart jolted in his chest sickeningly. He cleared his throat.  
“Just... don’t come in ‘til it’s done.”

“Uh. Sure thing. Are you... okay?”

Wasn’t that just the question of the hour? Katsuki wasn’t even too sure himself at this point. And Katsuki was many things, but he wasn’t a liar... not to Kirishima at least.

“I’ll get back to you on that,” he replied gruffly, before making his way towards the stairwell without looking back.

He could feel Kirishima’s worried eyes on his back all the way up the first flight of stairs.

He steadfastly ignored them.

# Chapter 9

## Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay, it's been really tough these last couple of weeks! Thank you to everyone who took the time to leave comments/kudos!

A real polite request here - if you're enjoying, it would be so lovely if you could leave a comment with what you like! If there's anything you don't like too, or any concrit, a comment about that (as I'm always wanting to improve what I'm publishing) is more than welcome too!

Thank you again to applecider18 for the help - any mistakes/blips are my own :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

*“Bushida Asumi isn’t just our daughter. She is a mother and a sister too.*

*I remember when she was just 5 years old. She was absolutely desperate to give her father a birthday present but... well, we didn’t have much in the way of disposable income back then. Our Asumi loved drawing and I will never forget the way she stood there, this tiny thing in her summer dress with ribbons in her hair, and declared that she would simply sell her pictures until she had enough yen to buy the perfect birthday present.*

*And that’s exactly what she did. On the street outside our apartment, at school, on the bus... she would sell her drawings for 5 yen apiece until she had enough money to buy a handkerchief to put in a felt pocket that she had made at school.*

*Our inability to provide even some of the most basic provisions for our family deeply impacted Asumi. She always wanted to help out – the first time we ever saw a glimpse of any ... law-breaking , was when she was fourteen. She had stolen some vegetables from the market when she noticed*

*that our own portions at dinner were dwindling to ensure that the children had a hot meal every evening. We dropped her right back to that market to return what she had taken and to apologise, but the seed had been planted. It spiralled from there until she wound up with a criminal record and was permanently excluded from school by the time she was sixteen. Before we knew it, our daughter had cut contact with us and her two children – our granddaughters – were born not long after that. Their father wasn't in the picture for long, so it soon became just the three of them against the world.*

*When you have nothing – when you can't even clothe your children – and someone offers you an unbelievable sum of money or security for running a small errand like dropping off a bag of Trigger on a street corner... how can you say no? Then it escalates until you're trapped, just like our daughter. Up and down the country, there are thousands upon thousands of Asumis who are all victims, until they're classed as villains. It's only then that they finally get some attention.*

*Our daughter was by no means perfect, but she was loved. She deserved as much of a chance to be saved as anybody else."*

Kaminari paused the interview on his phone with a tap of his thumb, his brow furrowed in thought.

He had never truly understood until that moment just how lucky he was. His family was by no means *exceptionally* well off, but he had never gone without. He had never had to worry, or even really think about, his family's finances let alone wonder where his next meal was coming from.

His mind wandered to Uraraka. He didn't know her as well as other members of the class, but he knew her well enough to be aware of her family's financial struggles. Could something similar have happened to her if she hadn't been born with a strong enough Quirk to get into U.A.? Was he wrong for even thinking that?



He shook his head and turned over to his side, pulling his duvet over his head.

Kaminari Denki wasn't someone who considered himself a particularly deep thinker – if it looked like a horse and smelled like a horse, he wasn't going to go looking for capybaras.

*Wait, was that the right phrase?*

Anyway.

For the most part, he was happy to follow what he had always known to be true: Heroes were heroes, Villains were villains; Heroes were right, and Villains were wrong. Friends should support one another, friends should be on each other's sides, and most importantly, friends shouldn't sit up until midnight multiple evenings in a row debating whether their friend was a murderer like the news was saying instead of taking his side and defending him.

Because his friend wasn't the bad guy in all this... right?

The more he heard and the more he thought, the less convinced he became.

And that was terrifying.

He was well aware he wouldn't win any prizes for academics any time soon. It wasn't that he was completely stupid – he managed to get into the most prestigious school in the country by himself, after all, so he must have a *few* brain cells to rub together, even if he wasn't as naturally gifted as some of his genius classmates. He just didn't stand

out enough – or have enough interest, for that matter – to pursue anything other than a career as a Hero.

He had grown up the same as any other kid his age: he could recite catchphrases and slogans from his favourite Pros whose posters covered every inch of his room; he would watch their battles and interviews in open-mouthed awe, and picking a new hero-themed bento box before the start of each school year was a definite highlight of his back-to-school shopping. The difference was that he never grew out of it like his other school friends did as they got older. It wasn't just a phase; it was a passion and a *need* to do *something* in his life that was useful and that he was actually *good* at.

What if the very foundation on which he had built his worldview was wrong? Who really decided the boundary between using your Quirk to be a Hero or using your Quirk to be a villain? When he had whooped and danced triumphantly in front of the T.V. as he watched a hero take a villain down, was he actually celebrating ‘*state-sanctioned murder*’?

He shoved his face under his pillow.

Thinking this much and this deeply made his stomach twist with the guilt and uncertainty of it all.

His whole life had been invested into becoming one of the people he had looked up to the most for the last seventeen years.

Now, as he tossed and turned into another sleepless night, he found himself incredibly unsure that this was even something he wanted to do anymore.

As soon as his bedroom door was locked behind him, Katsuki simply leaned against it and let himself slide to the floor with a soft thud, the stupid scrapbook nestled between his knees.

He felt dangerously calm given the weight of the conversation he had just had. At least Asumi hadn't rematerialized after melting into the grass earlier.

He pulled out his phone, taking advantage of his emotional state (or lack thereof) to finally call his mother.

Aizawa was right. He had fucked up, but there wasn't a single goddamn thing he could do about that right now. The only thing left for him to focus on were things he *could* control... or at least try to fix. That way, he could make mental space for all the other shit that was about to be thrown his way in the form of an inquiry and Deku's impending return to the dorms.

Speaking of.

He braced himself and opened one of his mother's missed calls, before hitting re-dial.

It was answered before the first ring had even finished.

*"52 missed calls, Katsuki!"*

He held the phone from his ear with a wince at her greeting shriek. *Christ*, it was like he'd been birthed by a banshee.

“Yeah, yeah,” he growled, “I was ignoring you. I’d say I’m glad to hear your voice, but I don’t talk outta my ass, unlike some people.”

*“You damn brat! I am your mother – I pay for that phone you’ve ignored me on all week. 52 missed calls, unbelievable! ”*

He scoffed, the aggression between himself and his mother was like comforting static in his brain. It practically felt like coming home.

“Well, I’m here now, what the hell else do you want from me, hag?”

*“Oh, forgive me for being just a little concerned after getting the call that my son was laid up in some bed in a random-ass hospital halfway through my business trip,” she ranted. Bakugou rolled his eyes. “Forgive me for being a little concerned that your name is popping up all over the fucking news.” Her grating voice grew louder and shriller, somehow, “Forgive me, Katsuki, for being just a little goddamn concerned that after that, I don’t hear from my son for a WHOLE – no, Masaru, it’s my turn with him right now, dammit–”*

Her tinny voice suddenly seemed very far away.

*“Wh– Don’t you da –“*

The sound of a door closing on the other end of the line.

*“Kats?”*

Katsuki felt all the breath drop out of his mouth and the phone nearly slipped from his suddenly sweaty palms. His throat bobbed as he swallowed dryly.

His mother's aggressive concern was something that was familiar – he could understand it and he could handle it. His father, on the other hand, was far gentler and *grotesquely* honest with his feelings, attributes that neither he nor his mother possessed. He also seemed to understand his son better than anyone else on the planet, which Katsuki found almost infuriating because try as he might, he struggled to understand him in return.

He couldn't wrap his head around why someone as mild-mannered, calm, and kind as Bakugou Masaru would honestly put up with such an explosive, abrasive, and obnoxious wife and son.

It was never a thought he expressed out loud, nor one he even allowed to fully cross his brain. However, as a child in the dead of night, Katsuki sometimes found himself frozen with fear at the sudden thought of his father suddenly having *enough* and leaving. Deku's dad had basically done the same, and he had what seemed like the perfect wife and son, albeit one without a Quirk. If someone as genuinely loving and compassionate as Midoriya Inko and her son hadn't been good enough for Midoriya Hisashi, then why the hell would his father stick around for their bullshit on a daily basis?

The idea made him so sick to his stomach that he would do with it as he did with anything else that made him feel as uncomfortable or inferior: blast it into oblivion.

As he got older, he realised that wasn't how the world worked, and while the Bakugous most certainly could not be compared to the Midoriyas, it didn't make the thought any less painful.

Despite that, he felt that same frozen feeling beginning to overtake his body – Bakugou Masaru did not raise a killer. He didn't deserve a killer for a son.

He was far too good of a man for that.

“Dad.”

His mouth was suddenly unbelievably dry.

*“Ignore your mother, she’s just worried about you,”* he began, his voice unbearably soft and so full of love that Katsuki struggled to wrap his head around it, *“How are you?”*

“I –“

Bakugou Katsuki was many things, but he wasn't a liar.

There was a long pause.

*“It’s alright if you don’t want to talk about it, son,”* he eventually soothed, reminding Katsuki once again just how well his father seemed to understand him, *“I’m just so grateful to hear your voice.”*

Katsuki sucked in a deep breath through his nose to calm his nerves before replying, “And you’re definitely much better to listen to than that old hag screeching through the phone.”

His father chuckled warmly. *“That might be the nicest thing anyone’s ever said to me,”* he replied with a clear smile in his voice.

And that was the only compliment he would be bestowing upon anyone for the rest of the year; his quota was complete.

“Then your life sucks even more than I realised.”

He really couldn’t help himself.

His father laughed, *“Well, it can’t be all that bad! I’ve got you and your mother in it after all.”*

*“Don’t think flattery is going to get you out of trouble!”* Katsuki could hear his mother shriek from the room she had been banished to.

“I dunno,” he breathed, “I’m probably more trouble than I’m worth right now.”

He froze.

*God fucking dammit, that definitely didn’t come out as sarcastic or blistering as he had meant it to. Had he just expressed his feelings to his father? Did he actually sound that fucking pathetic around the man that had raised him better than to go around killing innocent women?*

He felt himself begin to spiral into panic as his dad replied, his soothing voice concerned.

*“You’re never any trouble, Kats, ” he said firmly, “you’re my son. If I could make this all go away, I would.”*

And he knew he would too.

However, he was just a little too old and a little too criminal now for his dad to swoop in and fix things. This was a little bigger than a grazed knee or a broken ornament.

*“Things are hard right now, I get it,” he continued, before pausing and correcting himself, “Actually no, I can’t understand how this must feel for you. I won’t insult you by saying I do. But don’t ever think for even a second that we don’t love you or are any less proud of you than we ever have been, Katsuki. You’ll always have us, no matter what.”*

Katsuki felt his spiral momentarily halt, though the emotion behind the words made his skin crawl a little. He really wasn’t very good at conversations like this.

“Sap.” Was the only response he could think of, though he couldn’t help a small tone of gratitude spill through to taint the word. He knew his father would notice it too.

*“Your teacher told us about the inquiry and that they had arranged some counselling sessions for you,”* his father, sensing his son’s discomfort, steered the conversation away, *“have you had one yet?”*

“They start tomorrow.” He replied shortly, fiddling with the ribbon on the book still snug between his knees.



“Good!” There was a hint of surprise and pride there – was it really that shocking that he would willingly see a shrink?

...

Alright, fair enough, the surprise was probably warranted.

*“And how have you been keeping busy whilst classes are suspended?”*

That was a very subtle way of checking that he hadn’t been marinating in his own misery in his room every day.

“Gym. Library. We did some sparring.”

It wasn’t a lie.

*“I’m glad to hear. What are you doing today?”*

“Tch,” he spat, suddenly feeling defensive and dropping the ribbon in his fingers, “why are you asking so many questions?”

*“I’m just interested in what you get up to – would you like me to leave you to it?”*

“Whatever,” he shrugged. He wasn’t too sure he was ready to lose his father’s voice, but he also didn’t want to get dragged into another loaded conversation today.

*“I’ll let you go. You know where we are.”*

He grunted in response, gripping the phone tightly to his ear as if it would bring his father closer to him for a few more seconds.

*“I love you very much. Don’t doubt that, even for a second, Kats.”*

He closed his eyes against the swell of emotion in his chest. Once his father knew exactly what had happened after this *stupid* inquiry, he would realise just what a huge disappointment he was.

“... You too.”

Maybe this would be the last time he heard his parents say those words before they realised what a monster he had become.

He savoured it for just a second before the line went dead.

The phone dropped to the hardwood floor with a clatter.

He felt his breath begin to quicken and strangle around his throat.

He needed to do something.

He needed his brain to stop.

He grabbed the scrapbook.

He paused.

He grabbed his phone.

He went to open his chat app.

He remembered he had deleted it.

He opened his SMS instead.

**Bakugou Katsuki [13:27]:** Could you send me some pictures

**The Hag [13:27]:** Is there a please on the end of that?

**Bakugou Katsuki [13:28]:** You might need to ask Auntie Inko for some too

**The Hag [13:28]:** So she's 'Auntie Inko' and I'm saved as 'The Hag'?

**Bakugou Katsuki [13:28]:** Shut up can you do it or not

**The Hag [13:29]:** What did I do to deserve such a delightful son?

What photos do you want, brat?

**The Hag [13:33]:** ??????

**Bakugou Katsuki [13:35]:** Anything of me and Deku as kids

**The Hag [13:35]:** Come again?

**Bakugou Katsuki [13:36]:** I'm not repeating myself woman

**The Hag [13:36]:** Who are you and what have you done with my unsociable gremlin of a son?

**Bakugou Katsuki [13:36]:** Oi! I'm not fucking about can you send them or not????

**The Hag [13:36]:** Fine, fine. Gotta be honest, there's not a lot. You weren't exactly best buds for a long time. I'll see what I can do.

**Bakugou Katsuki [13:37]:** Hurry up, there's a deadline. I've gotta have this shit done before like 6.

**The Hag [13:37]:** Fucking hell Katsuki I do have a life outside of serving you

**Bakugou Katsuki [13:37]:** Hurry up would you!

**The Hag [13:45]:** This is all I have. I've texted Inko too. Now that I've gone out of my way I wanna know what this is for

**[The Hag sent 5 attachments]**

**Bakugou Katsuki [13:45]:** Later. Send me Auntie's stuff.

**The Hag [13:55]:** No respect. What did I do wrong?

**[The Hag sent 15 attachments]**

**Bakugou Katsuki [13:56]:** Thx

**The Hag [13:56]:** I wanna know what this is for!

Bakugou ignored her, turning his phone onto silent and booting up his printer.

Deku had better fucking cry tears of fucking joy over how much he loved this stupid, awful, nauseating project.

He sent the photos to print, feeling a hot pool of self-hatred beginning to bubble.

If this wasn't a gesture that extended a hand of friendship without actually having to verbalise his feelings, then he was giving up.

He spent the next few hours comfortably numb again as he focused on cutting, sticking, writing, and generally creating the greatest scrapbook page the world had ever seen, before leaving it open to dry and refusing to look at it, lest he vomit all over it.

Once it was dry enough to close, he did so with a snap (absolutely refusing to fuss with the ribbon that tied it together) and shoved it unceremoniously in its bag. He dumped it at Round Face's door loudly enough that it would get her attention and she would discover it sat at her threshold like an abandoned kitten.

(He practically sprinted back down the corridor, out of sight, before she opened her door though.)

He most certainly would *not* be engaging in a discussion with her about his masterpiece.

Problem number three could be crossed off his list now.

Unfortunately, that left his brain an awful lot of room to think – worse still, All Might would be here soon. Would he have to talk to him? What more could even be said at this point?

Luckily, he was once again spared from his overactive, treacherous brain by a knock on his door. He recognised the pattern instantly and grunted his approval for the visitor to intrude.

“I heard you leave earlier – did you finish the scrapbook?” Kirishima asked as he hovered in the doorway.

Katsuki looked at him incredulously, “You listening to my door,

stalker? Been keeping notes of my bathroom breaks too? Very Deku of you, Shitty Hair.”

Kirishima had the good grace to flush with embarrassment, “No, I just...” he sighed, clearly struggling to get the words out. Katsuki raised his eyebrows impatiently at him, absolutely refusing to make life easier for him. “Well, it’s been a rough few days, I’m just... kinda looking out for you... I guess?”

Katsuki stared at him, “By listening through the wall?”

“Hey!” Kirishima argued, “It’s not like I’m just sat there like...” Katsuki allowed him a sly grin, “Hey, stop messing with me.”

“Stop stalking me and I’ll think about it.”

Kirishima smiled at that; it was a blinding thing that lit up his eyes and bared his sharp teeth. He was clearly relieved by the banter.

“I *actually* came over to see if you wanted to come down for dinner tonight,” he said, “we were thinking of making a bunch of stuff and Mina was hoping you’d make your mapo tofu...” he frowned and lowered his voice, checking out the corner of his eyes as if said girl was listening from behind a corner. “In fact, between you and me, we were *all* hoping you’d make the mapo tofu. I never want to have to endure her version of it ever again.”

Two significant and completely unexpected reactions immediately rose up from the pits of his stomach at this suggestion. The first one was an intense, almost painful pang of hunger at the mention of food. The second, more worryingly, was a severe stab of overwhelming anxiety at the idea of eating and socialising with so many people at once.

*“Imagine,” Asumi scoffed, somewhere out of sight, “Imagine! Sitting there with all of these people who tolerate you for some reason, eating food, having a good time when I’ll never get to do that again with my family... my children. Do you think they get to do that anymore?”*

Her voice, still lacking a body, pressed closely against his ear.

*“You’ve taken everything from me. From them. You don’t deserve anything good.”*

There would be so many people there. Watching him, judging him, *condemning* him in a way that he knew he deserved but just couldn’t face. How could he sit there amongst people he treated like shit most of the time when people who actually *liked* and even *loved* Asumi would never be able to do the same thing again. Even worse, All Might was back tonight and, unlike Aizawa, would probably take them up on the offer of eating with his students.

He would see a complete failure every time he looked at Katsuki.

He wasn’t ready to face the disappointment in his hero’s eyes.

He wasn’t ready to talk about Deku.

“Bakugou?”

He had clearly frozen on the spot. He could feel his mouth gaping open, his throat tightened to a point where he couldn’t have replied, even if he knew what the fuck to say.



An understanding look crossed Kirishima's face after a second.

“Actually. Change of plan. Get your coat.”

That jolted him out of his silence.

“What?”

Since when did Kirishima suddenly become so authoritative?

\*\*\*

“Why are we here, dumbass?”

Kirishima looked very pleased with himself as he sat down next to a conveyer belt cheerfully carrying little sushi and dessert passengers. He patted the table opposite his own chair, looking so hopeful and pathetic that eventually, Katsuki had to scoff, roll his eyes, and practically shove himself in the other chair just to make it stop. He shoved his hands in his jacket pockets and glared.

“Isn't this great?”

Katsuki raised an eyebrow as he surveyed the room with quick eyes and no other movement.

“Why do the plates have kittens on them, Shitty-Hair?”

His patience was wearing thin.

Kirishima’s eyes were almost tearing up at the sight of them, “Look at their little *bow ties*, Bakugou.”

Katsuki sent him an absolutely withering glare. If he never saw one more cat with a completely ridiculous and unnecessary accessory on again, it would still be too soon.

“Kirishima.”

His friend’s face dropped at his tone. It wasn’t particularly aggressive or threatening, just... *exhausted*.

*Just tell me what you’re doing.*

“Ok, hear me out,” he began, leaning across the table and lowering his voice, “I figured it’s just you and me, right? There aren’t too many people around on a Sunday night, and these plates are tiny. You just eat what you want; we don’t have to talk.”

And with that, he turned away and grabbed the nearest dish passing by and left Katsuki to make his decision without an audience.

Katsuki felt his mouth go a little dry and his stomach lurch at Kirishima’s words, but not necessarily unpleasantly. In fact, he understood the logic perfectly. Sushi was essentially rice and a small

topping or filling – very simple and easy on his stomach which, at this point, had probably forgotten what food was. The plates were small and unintimidating and, even if he didn't eat a huge amount, there would be very little waste to explain away or hide from questioning eyes. Lastly, it was a small restaurant and Kirishima had snagged them a table right in the back corner, and strategically sat so his back was to the rest of the restaurant, and Katsuki's chair was practically in the shadows at the edge of the room. He didn't have the words to express his appreciation or recognition of the fact that Kirishima was more of a friend than he had ever deserved. Instead, after giving him a long look, he made his thoughts clear by simply reaching out and choosing a tiny plate of dorayaki.

He chose to ignore the intense relief Kirishima couldn't quite keep off his face. Relief that he was eating or relief he hadn't been blasted for his interfering (maybe a mixture of both), Bakugou couldn't quite tell.

Despite the minuscule (and, honestly, criminally priced) portion of food, he felt immediately full after the first few bites. It was sweet, and a little too cloying in his mouth – his stomach wasn't entirely sure it agreed with it. He pushed the plate to one side before trying something different... mostly because he realised, with a small hit of confusion and mild disgust, that he knew that refusing to eat again would just worry his friend and he found, for the first time ever, he cared about that and didn't want to make someone else upset.

Thinking about it was making him uncomfortable, so he distracted himself by lifting the lid off the plate of salmon nigiri in front of him. Opposite, Kirishima had taken the same but was looking at his chopsticks like they were laced with poison.

It suddenly struck him as he lifted his own chopsticks tentatively to his mouth.

“Wait, you don't like sushi.”

Kirishima immediately spat his mouthful into his napkin with a very dramatic gag, looking like a weight had been hoisted from his shoulders, “Thank God you called me out on it, I literally hate raw fish.” He shuddered, “That was awful. Mind if I order off the hot menu?”

Katsuki couldn’t help but grin with amusement, “You didn’t have to do that, Shitty-Hair,” he admonished with an impulsive laugh, “I’d have eaten something either way – I’m not a toddler.”

Kirishima was now frantically raiding the dessert dishes, trying to get rid of the taste. Katsuki took a small amount of pity on him and nudged his half-eaten pancakes towards him.

“I’m glad you did, bro,” Kirishima said very seriously, before smirking and adding, “I would have hated to have to do a choo-choo train in front of all these nice people.”

He reached out and saved his donated dorayaki before Katsuki could snatch it back with a laugh. Despite the instinctive scowl at the joke made on his behalf, he couldn’t help but mirror Kirishima’s smile. He had absolutely no doubt that the resulting expression made him look a little demonic, but he didn’t care.

For the first time in what felt like forever, he... *forgot* everything that was going on.

It was nice to pretend, for a few short hours, that the world outside of his and Kirishima’s warm and kitten-filled bubble didn’t exist.

**CrimsonParty701:**

***Link: Heroes and Villains? Is Hero Reform Too Little Too Late for Bushida Asumi and Bakugou Katsuki?***

**CrimsonParty701:**

*What are your thoughts on this article guys?*

**Mt.Laddy:**

*Omg don't even get me started – ok tbh i think it raises some really good points about hero reform but how the fuck is the media getting away with basically harassing a kid for this? Like fair enough make your point and i dont blame the girls parents at all but where are the adults? why is the agency dynamight was working with keeping so quiet? hes a kid, this is insane*

**BabyBlue95:**

*I disagree; he's nearly 18. I'm on a hero course (not U.A., don't @ me) and I'm a year younger. I know the difference between subduing someone and straight up murdering them. Come on, don't insult us students in your rush to defend him. It's not like he's known for his pacifist and chill attitude already, is it?*

**Mt.Laddy:**

*I see your point too, but its a slippery slope – what else can we start accusing kids of when technically its meant to be the pro heroes taking responsibility. isnt it super hard to get experience at agencies these days anyway exactly because they dont want to be held accountable?*

**manysmallturtlesinhats:**

*I feel bad for the kid – I can't imagine he's running around feeling good about all of this. Can you imagine how legit traumatising this must be for anyone, let alone a student? Especially after an entire WAR last year. Has*

*anyone thought about that? Hope U.A. is taking care of him.*

**CrimsonParty710:**

*I imagine they will be and that's why we've not heard from them. Though, saying that, I've been hearing rumblings of an inquiry – wonder if it'll be public?*

**DramaLlama67:**

*Maybe not the whole thing as he'll probably have to speak at it – and wasn't here there with that Deku kid too? They're under 18 so anything public might just be a summary and what they decide at the end of it???*

**manysmallturtlesinhats:**

*Hope so.*

**Facepalm:**

*Lol r u guys 4 real? cant believe i'm reading some of this shit?? he literally killed someone – how is this even a debate? we wouldnt be talking like this about a regular old 'villain' so y is this kid special? jokers.*

**BabyBlue95:**

*Right? I feel like I'm losing my mind reading some of these comments.*

**CrimsonParty710:**

*It depends what you're reading – putting it together, it sounds like it was a genuine accident. Most of the mainstream stuff hasn't said anything but other sources have the witnesses saying that he was injured, so was the other kid and he acted in self-defence. I wasn't there so I can only speculate but it seems like it was an accident.*

**BabyBlue95:**

*He should still be expelled.*

**SmallMight123:**

*Idk, U.A. have obviously trained him well – would the school be right in expelling a kid who is essentially a walking weapon? Taking away the means for him to use that power for good, crushing his dreams and taking away any support he probably needs for his mental health rn seems like a surefire way to create a vigilante at best, motivated supervillain at worst. Have we learnt nothing??*

**PurpleFestival999:**

*Well, I WAS there, can confirm, was an accident. Me and everyone else there would be dead instead if he hadn't done something, including the other kid. I've held my tongue, but I can't keep reading this bullshit and not say anything.*

**Facepalm:**

*Yh right u were there prove it*

**PurpleFestival999:**

*Obviously, I can't do that, and I don't want to say too much in case it does end up in court or whatever. Believe what you want but that's the truth. Stay salty.*

**Facepalm:**

*lol convenient*

**PurpleFestival999:**

Anyway, even if I wasn't, this whole th-

“Yo, Kami!”

Kaminari immediately slammed his laptop down at Mina's voice cutting through the wood of his door and she gave a cursory knock before letting herself in.

“Did you want to –“ she cut off at his guilty look and the almost protective way he had flung himself over his laptop, “oh... sorry. Was I interrupting something?” Her eyes lit up mischievously. “What were you doing, Sparky? Oh my God, was it p-“

“Don't say porn.”

“-ORN?”

“Agh,” Kaminari felt his face flush embarrassingly, “It *totally* wasn't.”

“It *toooooo*tally was, oh my God - no shade here!” Mina giggled, “I'll leave you to it!”

Kaminari felt his face lift at her infectious smile, before the nervous jump his stomach gave dragged it back down again.

He stopped her before she could close his door again with an impulsive, “Hey, Mina?”



Her head popped back through the gap, “What’s up?”

Kaminari sighed, not really knowing how to start. This was way more serious than he was used to but he didn’t know what else to do with his thoughts at this point – Mina would know what to do... right?

She was always so sure and so confident – he could use a boost of that right now.

“Can I ask you something?”

“Sure!” she bounced back in, looking so pleased and cheerful, that he struggled to find the words.

“It’s just...”

She looked at him expectantly, her smile starting to slip as she sensed the tense atmosphere in the room.

“Are you ok?”

He felt his thought process short-circuit – suddenly, despite the hours of internal debate and reading everyone else’s opinions on the subject, he almost couldn’t quantify his doubts or put into words how he was feeling. Was it even that big a deal? It had nothing to do with him after all.

He couldn’t do it. He couldn’t question Bakugou – not yet anyway. He just didn’t have the words.

“Uh...” he faltered, feeling himself start to sweat at Mina’s increasingly concerned gaze. He rubbed the back of his neck anxiously.

*Abort, abort, abort.*

“Uh... could we... look over some of that math test that’s been rescheduled to tomorrow?” he improvised.

Mina gave him a slightly suspicious look. Great, she saw right through him.

“But I suck at Math. We should ask Baku-”

*“No!”*

His response was just a little too quick and a little too desperate to get away with. There was an awkward pause.

He forced out what he hoped was an easy laugh to cut through some of the awkward tension in the air, “Me too but maybe we can work it out together? You can’t be worse than me.”

Mina seemed to take the bait, “You wanna bet?” she joked, before heading back to the door, “Let me just grab my stuff and I’ll be back in a sec.”

Kaminari sighed and slumped in his desk chair as she left.

Crisis averted. Hopefully.

He completely missed the suspicious frown that marred Mina's features as she headed down the corridor.

Chapter End Notes

Have a lovely weekend - thank you for reading!

# Chapter 10

## Chapter Notes

Hi! Felt like posting as the last few weeks have been super rough (totally expected but no less exhausting!) and publishing makes me happy. Thank you so much for the kind comments so far - I'm super worried that this might be getting a bit... boring? pacing wise? So I'm trying to pick up the pace a bit but there's SO much to wrap up! Please do let me know if I need to speed it up a bit more; I'd hate to be boring you all to tears!

Please enjoy :) (and mind the 'unreliable narrator' tag!)

\*\*\*Wee Disclaimer - I have no idea about Maths. Maths confuses and frightens me. I'm so sorry if my attempt at Maths in this chapter here causes offence because it is so bad, I literally googled some GCSE Maths questions and picked the ones that worked for the story, my bad \\_(ツ)\_/ Maths is not my friend.

Maths.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The next day was a Monday; a modified timetable had been distributed the evening before. Katsuki had scoffed when the email pinged on his phone, with an additional counselling slot in place of the usual time for practical lessons, which had been temporarily suspended.

His reaction gained a quick look from Kirishima who ultimately had chosen not to pry, for which Katsuki was grateful. It had been a – dare he admit it – *fun* evening, and he wanted to savour the temporary break from his own self-destructing brain for at least the rest of the evening before everything kicked off again the next day in the form of invasive counselling sessions, gawping stares from the rest of the students and accusatory inquiries.

As dawn rose on a rainy and humid Monday morning, Katsuki peeled his dry eyes open reluctantly at the incessant beeping of his phone's

alarm, wishing more than anything he could ignore it. Sure, he had slept better than he had done in a fair few days, warm and heavy from food and... ugh, screw it... *friendship* from the night before, but that didn't mean he had slept *well*. He often found himself jerking awake to a weird falling sensation; it felt like it happened every few seconds, though in reality, was probably every few hours or so.

For the first time in his life, he rolled over and blindly poked at his phone until he found the 'snooze' button and promptly fell back asleep.

He was awoken by his secondary alarm less than five minutes later.

He growled and threw his phone across the room, where it smacked satisfyingly against the wall, prompting an abrupt, distinctly 'unmanly' shriek of surprise from the room next door.

Katsuki allowed himself a grin - at least his temper flare had been somewhat productive. He felt a little better for it *and* it had woken up Kirishima who was often one of the last out of the door in the morning: half-dressed, frantically shoving on his blazer with one hand, a shoe with the other, with half a slice of toast hanging out of his mouth.

As usual, he found himself one of the first in the classroom, behind only Iida who had returned the evening before with All Might.

Despite an undoubtedly late night fielding frantic questions from the other extras in the dorm room, he sat there, as scheduled, books neatly piled and stationery perfectly aligned on his desk: the epitome of the perfect class representative.

Katsuki slunk past his desk without a word, again as was standard... except this time, Glasses paused in his pencil sharpening to watch his journey across the room.

Katsuki completely ignored him and leaned back in his chair, his legs propped on his desk as usual, but he made extra sure to be as obnoxious as possible in his posture to really get under Glasses' skin. If he wanted a show, he'd get a goddamn show.

He deliberately avoided making eye contact with Deku's very empty desk.

Annoyingly, Glasses didn't rise to the bait which set an unpleasant fire of annoyance under Katsuki's skin, and he gripped his hands into fists in annoyance.

So, this was the way it was going to go, was it?

Kid gloves all day? Tiptoeing around him like a goddamn damsel in distress?

"Bakugou..." Glasses eventually broke the awkward silence, "I..."

Katsuki didn't even give him the chance to finish his sentence, "Oh my God, it's too early to listen to your *bitching*, Glasses," he growled, dropping his chair to the floor with a horrific squeak and crack against the tiles, "I'm studying, go nag someone else."

And with that, he made a performance of digging out his Math book before hiding his face behind it.

He remembered his previous thought that perhaps he was growing more mature - this definitely blew that theory out of the water.

Either way, it made Glasses swallow and go back to sharpening his pencils in silence, so Katsuki counted that as a win.

In a trickle of individuals and small groups, the rest of the class gradually piled in, some cheerfully chatting with one another, pleased to be back in a routine, with others (such as Kaminari and Ashido) looking like they were still half-asleep: clearly, their bedtime routine would need the rest of the week to re-adjust to the early starts.

Katsuki had shoved his earphones in not long after the door opened to the first group and looked furiously at his notes, pointedly ignoring subtle glances from the likes of Jirou and Tokoyami, and the blatant, open-jawed staring from students who clearly didn't value their lives very much (Mineta).

He did acknowledge the flicked elastic band that was skilfully pinged across the classroom to bounce off Mineta's eyeball with impressive aim with a raised eyebrow at Kirishima, who blinked back innocently at him when Mineta immediately let out a high-pitched shriek and begged his attacker to stop.

After that (frankly embarrassing on the Grapist's part) spectacle, the stares died down and, by the time Aizawa skulked into the room like the spectre he truly was, the class had taken the hint and stopped actively paying attention to their classmate, though he could feel the occasional burning heat of Icy Hot's intense gaze on the back of his head.

He had seemed less than impressed to be back at school sans Deku and had clearly been forced on the bullet train back to U.A. by All Might the evening before, along with Glasses.

Katsuki supposed that was a good thing - it meant the nerd was well enough to need less coddling and, were he in any real danger, there was no way that Icy Hot would be sitting in the classroom right now.

Not that he cared.

He realised, with a small cold feeling, that meant Deku, possibly All Might... and maybe even the rest of 2-A had now seen the contents of the scrapbook. The cold feeling was erased by the hot flush of embarrassment as he felt his cheeks heat up - Jesus, is this how the half and half bastard felt all the time? Grim.

He pushed that from his mind and popped his headphones from his ears as Aizawa dragged himself to his podium, raising an unnecessary hand for silence - everyone had immediately fallen quiet once he had crossed the front of the room.

Rollcall, new timetable check, any questions? “silent study hall, don’t wake me unless it’s urgent”.

Fifteen minutes later, Aizawa practically rolled out of the room to be replaced by Ectoplasm.

Katsuki was dully aware of Dunce-Face and Racoon Eyes’s groans as they smacked their foreheads on their desk once the dreaded Math paper was handed around the room.

Katsuki found he both desperately appreciated the normality whilst simultaneously finding it stifling and infuriating, but he scratched away obligingly at the quiz anyway.



He felt his mind wander.

*No, focus.*

**Find  $x + y$ , if  $2x + 3y = 8$  and  $3x + 5y = 13$**

The scraping of pencils on paper made his skin crawl.

2.

*No, not 2, moron. Do it again.*

**Find  $x + y$ , if  $2x + 3y = 8$  and  $3x + 5y = 13$**

He felt his mind go completely blank and he gripped his pencil in frustration.

*For fuck's sake, it's not that hard.*

He chanced a quick glance over at Dunce-Face, which normally reassured him as he was often the last to turn his test in - at least Katsuki could usually rely on being quicker than him.

Wait.

*What the fuck.*

He was turning the page.

Glasses, Ponytail and Frog-Face had already turned their work in and were sitting patiently at their tables, looking slightly bored whilst waiting for the others to catch up.

Even Round Face was starting to collect her paper to bring it to the front.

*Fuck, fuck, fuck.*

**Find  $x + y$ , if  $2x + 3y = 8$  and  $3x + 5y = 13$**

He felt sweat begin to pop on his forehead and his adam's apple bobbed as his leg started to jiggle. He glared at it furiously in a demand to cease immediately. His leg cheerfully ignored him and the vibrations seemed to increase in intensity.

*Fucking...*

3.

The answer was 3.

He scribbled it down furiously and tackled the rest of the paper quickly.

It was sloppy and he knew it. He knew Ectoplasm would notice it too and probably rat him out to Aizawa or his parents or both.

He became acutely aware of stares at the back of his head once more. He was never the last to turn in an exam.

His paper was a mess of harsh strikeouts, so rough against the paper that he had practically torn holes in it.

He practically threw the paper on his teacher's desk. Ectoplasm simply tucked it into his pile of exams and thanked him accordingly.

*Get it together.*

He barely remembered the other lessons before lunch, but he was sure he didn't make an idiot of himself again, so that was fine. He'd look over Kirishima's shoddy notes later and get the general idea. Maybe he would even lower himself to demanding Ponytail share her notebooks, but he wasn't sure his dignity was quite so far in the gutter as to prostrate himself before her and admit she was academically superior that day.

To make things worse, if the pencils on paper had been enough to make his skin crawl, lunch was an affair that was going to make him rip his skin off.

Kirishima, bless his soul, had taken it upon himself to barrier Katsuki from the rest of the lunch hall by saving him a spot nearest a wall, whilst he took the chair next to it. The gesture was appreciated without words as it blocked the ogling from the rest of the school body who had clearly caught up on the news. He wondered briefly if he had also instructed Duncie-Face and the others to stay away as they chose to sit at a different table, though it later became apparent that

wasn't the case.

There was also very blatant gap at the end of the table taken up by Deku's loser friends.

Soy Sauce Face had wandered over at some point to say 'hi', only to be duly ignored by Katsuki and greeted enthusiastically by Kirishima. Racoon Eyes looked strangely conflicted as she peered a little frantically between their table and Duncie-Face next to her, who was very determinedly avoiding his gaze hitting them. She looked like she was watching a very slow, very boring game of tennis.

*Fine. Whatever. He didn't have time for his shitty teenage drama anyway.*

It didn't miss his attention how Kirishima's fist gripped his chopsticks a little too tightly when he realised how spread out their usually close group was.

"Leave it, Shitty Hair," he mumbled, his first words since he had raged at Glasses that morning.

Kirishima did leave it, but he didn't look happy about it.

The afternoon's practical lesson had been replaced with a recap on Hero Laws and Ethics, something that Katsuki had already pretty much nailed down in the first session and through his own independent reading and research. He almost - *almost* - felt a small amount of sympathy for the likes of Icy Hot, Ponytail and Glasses who also would have already mastered the content and would be in for a boring few hours. At the back of the room, the half and half bastard looked like he was one wrong look away from setting his desk on fire - he wasn't exactly shy about his displeasure being back in the classroom without Deku, and the fact that the lesson was essentially a

repeat of a previous course was simply insult to injury.

As for Katsuki, he would much rather be forced to sit through hours of repeated lessons he had already learnt if it meant he could avoid being very conspicuously missing from the classroom to attend his... *shudder...* therapy session.

He stared at Hound Dog's door, which suddenly felt several feet taller than it actually was and resembled some sort of entranceway to hell. He stopped dead in front of it, seemingly incapable of moving any further.

What the fuck did they want him to say?

He could just walk away. No one could force him to go, right?

Would that be an instant expulsion?

He sighed in annoyance as his feet refused to move.

He was saved the effort when he felt a ghostly hand squarely shove at the centre of his back and heard the echo of a young, ethereal giggle float through his brain.

"Let's just get this over with," he growled to himself, before practically blasting the door open. It screeched on its hinges and slammed against the wall.

Hound Dog didn't even flinch from the file he was reading.

*His file.*

He was going to be sick. Violently. All over the stupid pastel-coloured carpet and all over the stupid air diffuser and all over the stupid ‘Wow! *There’s hair down there!*’ and ‘*How To Train Your Stepparents 101*’ pamphlets in the stupid beech display shelf.

Probably all over Hound Dog too.

This was so *humiliating*.

“Bakugou.” Hound Dog simply barked at him in an amicable greeting, seemingly completely unaffected by his dramatic entrance, “Good afternoon.”

“Is it?” he demanded with a touch more rage in his voice than he had anticipated.

*Dammit, would that go against his final grade?*

*How does one pass therapy?*

Hound Dog ignored his snark.

“Close the door behind you,” he growled through his muzzle as he tossed the file onto the table.

Katsuki did so with a resounding slam.

\*\*\*

Ok, so it turned out counselling was both not so bad, but also fucking *awful*.

The first thirty minutes had been spent with him sat in a stony silence whilst Hound Dog tried to pry some reasonably low-stakes questions from him.

*How was his day?*

*What was it like going back to class?*

*What didn't go so well today?*

To his credit, Katsuki had at least attempted to give one word answers to these questions, only breaking his vow of silence when he remembered Aizawa's little pep talk the day before.

He didn't want to let more people down, so he at least *tried*.

But as soon as he had opened his mouth to speak, it was like a chain wrapped itself around his chest and a gag shoved itself inside his mouth, blocking the words behind his teeth.

It was *infuriating*.

What was even more infuriating is that Hound Dog seemed to *understand*.

Katsuki wasn't even too sure *why* it pissed him off so much that Hound Dog seemed to get him, but it did and he was absolutely seething about it, even into the early hours of the evening.

Eventually, the chains had loosened slightly and the gag was removed, just enough for Hound Dog to inform him of the date set for the first day of the inquiry.

Wednesday.

He had to hand it to Nezu, the rodent was *quick*.

But that opened a whole new box of problems.

What was he supposed to do? What was he supposed to say? What was he supposed to... wear? Would it be held in a courtroom where he would be displayed as the criminal he was? Would it be held in a stuffy office where the gag would come back and prevent him from speaking aloud?

Would... fuck, would her *parents* be there? Her *children*? Would he have to speak to them?

Before he had known it, those questions had poured out of his mouth like a destructive lava, completely destroying any pretence (no matter how brittle and feeble) that he was perfectly fine about all of this,



thank you very much, and not phased by the idea of an inquiry.

Hound Dog, as much as his outward appearance would suggest otherwise, was a surprisingly calming presence in the room, and soaked in all of Katsuki's anxious questioning like a particularly absorbent sponge.

He growled.

"I won't lie," he replied, once he was sure Bakugou had finished venting, "It's not going to be fun. Look at it one step at a time, ruff?"

"Ru- *tch*. Sure thing."

"First - it's normal to be nervous. Inquiry will expect nervous children."

Hound Dog ignored Katsuki's visible irritation at being referred to as 'children'.

"Second. Parents will likely watch. They want justice for their pup. As much as we want justice for our own."

Hound Dog gave another questioning growl, clearly wanting Katsuki to acknowledge his sentence. Katsuki was too busy trying to not fall into the gaping pit that had suddenly manifested somewhere in his lower stomach to manage anything more than a slightly sickly nod as his face paled.

How the fuck was he supposed to look *her* parents in the eye when he could barely even speak to his own over a phone?

“No children allowed except you, Kirishima and Midoriya. Maybe Todoroki and Iida.”

Well, that was something at least. He could feel an anxious twitch starting in his eyebrow. He rubbed it tiredly.

“No courtroom like on T.V. A smaller room in the courthouse. Aizawa and Nezu will be with you. Your parents too. Under 18.”

*His* parents? His parents had to sit and listen to all the shit he did? Not only would he have to keep it together for the officials and his teachers but his parents too?

This was a nightmare.

Hound Dog clearly clocked onto Katsuki's growing discomfort and he narrowed his sharp eyes at him.

“Talk!” he demanded.

Were his body even capable of producing more adrenaline at this point, he might have jumped at the sudden loud and gruff tone. As it was, he barely flinched, but did fold his arms protectively across his chest, covering his wildly fluttering heart.

Though, in all honesty, he preferred Hound Dog's direct and slightly

threatening approach - it was very similar to the way that he liked to solve problems and was far more effective than some poor, softly-spoken, over-empathetic therapist trying to gently wheedle his emotions out of him.

“About what?”

“Thoughts! Feelings!”

“Uh,” the abruptness near enough knocked the words out of his mouth, “I’m... pretty... I don’t fucking know... *worried* about meeting her parents, I guess?”

Scared of meeting some little old couple. Scared of facing consequences for his own behaviour. *How heroic.*

“Normal! Not cowardly. You feel guilty.”

“Well yeah, I did murder their daughter.”

“Very quick to say that. Quickest answer in half an hour.”

*Damn, he wasn’t wrong.*

“It’s the truth, ain’t it?” he growled, and scowled, tightening his arms across his chest.

“Why ‘murder’? Was it deliberate?”

And goddammit, if that question didn't throw him for a hot second.

He definitely aimed that blast at her very deliberately, but it had never crossed his mind to actually try to even significantly harm her beyond knocking her out so she could be cuffed. It really *wasn't* that he had meant to kill her but...

"I was irresponsible. But I didn't mean to hurt her."

It physically pained him to admit he had lost control and had made a mistake... but that was the truth. Like Aizawa had said, he should never have pulled that pin until he was certain where that blast was going to hit... but hero or not, villain or not, he was *not* someone who killed another on purpose.

And by definition, that meant...

"Not a murderer."

Hound Dog simply voiced what his mind finally considered.

"I'm not a murderer."

From her silent seat on the warm, green couch next to him, Asumi dimmed just a shade. She looked at him, her eyes wide.

*"You might have never meant to hurt me. But you still did."*

“I’m sorry.”

Her eyes widened, just a touch, and shimmered with the same tears that had leaked from her eyes as her life left her body.

*“You’ve never said that before,”* she whispered hoarsely.

“Well. I am. I’m so sorry.”

“To who?” Hound Dog interrupted.

“Asumi.” He felt his eyes involuntarily well up and he scrubbed at them furiously. “Her parents. Her *kids*. The goddamn teachers.” He felt his voice catch and break as the dark pit that had been swirling around his heart and lungs for the last few days finally bubbled up and spilled out from his mouth. A few tears dribbled from the corner of his eyes, born from frustration and sorrow. “I don’t know why it takes me so goddamn long to just fucking *apologise*.”

*To Deku. To All Might. To Kirishima. Now to Asumi.*

“But what good does one fucking word do, huh? I can’t bring her back. I don’t know what I’m supposed to do...”

His voice broke off and he slammed his mouth shut, as he felt a few more rogue tears dribble shakily down his face. He desperately suppressed the shudders he could feel building up in his shoulders. He’d already said too damn much - he wasn’t going to add crying to the fucking list entitled ‘shit that’s wrong with Bakugou’ that likely lay

in Hound Dog's manila file.

“ *Prove it.* ” Asumi's voice trickled into his ear at the same time that Hound Dog's much louder bark matched her words.

“You express thoughts with actions. Not words. Words mean little to you. Actions will make you feel better. Actions will mean more.”

“I can't fucking resurrect her.”

“No. But you can help others. Others like her. Help them before they become villains. Help rebuild. Show them you're the hero we know you are. Ruff.”

Katsuki sat stock still for long enough that the tear tracks on his face began to dry and itch. He felt... lighter. Nowhere near better or back to normal but... less weighed down. He hadn't even realised how tense his shoulders had permanently become until he felt them relax and ache from overuse and poor posture.

It was the start of a plan. Uncertainties were starting to clear up. He knew, roughly, what to expect at the inquiry. He had an idea of how he could maybe tease out something *good* from this whole situation.

Now, he just had to do it.

\*\*\*

“Stop tugging at it.”

Katsuki forced his fingers away from his stiff shirt collar with a burning glare at his teacher in the car seat next to him. This was the first time since before middle school that he had worn a tie and done his top button up, with the exception of his time on I-Island and the time he and the rest of his classmates stood up to Endeavour, and *God* was this just reminding him why he fucking hated shirts and ties in the first place. They were too damn starchy and stiff and they made him sweat, which meant he had to be extra careful where he placed his hands, lest he spread literally *explosive* liquid somewhere he shouldn't spread literally *explosive* liquid.

He could practically *feel* his neck turning red from where the harshness of the material was rubbing awkwardly on his skin. He pulled it again, much to Aizawa's disapproval.

"All you're going to do is tear the button off and hell if I'm going to sew that back on for you. Stop."

Aizawa was equally well-dressed, with his hair pulled back into a low, half-bun and his face was clean-shaven. It served to make Katsuki far more nervous. His stomach was churning sickly as the cab rumbled underneath them; he was really starting to regret eating the rice and miso Kirishima had forced down his throat earlier. It felt like it would make a reappearance soon.

He shifted uncomfortably and started picking at his seatbelt instead, "Are we *there* yet?"

Aizawa gave him *a look*. "Don't start."

"*Tch.* "

He threw as much aggressively anxious venom as humanly possible

into the sound as he shoved his face against the window, hoping the coolness of the glass would cool him down. It did, somewhat, but not enough to make him any less uncomfortable.

“When we get there, we’ll need to sign in at the front desk,” Aizawa said after a few moments of tense silence, the only sound the occasional clicking of the driver indicating, and the hum of his engine as he sped up as they reached the main road, “They’ll call us in when they’re ready. Most of the time, I imagine we’ll be sitting in the waiting room. Did you bring something to keep yourself busy?”

Katsuki found the idea of being able to sit quietly and engage his brain in something other than the inquiry and knowing that his vict... no - *Asumi’s* - parents were a few feet away on the other side of a thin wall absolutely ludicrous, but for once, held his tongue. “Homework.” He grunted shortly. “I’ve got my phone, too.”

“We’re about five minutes away, Eraserhead.” The driver piped up from the front seat.

Aizawa acknowledged him with a quick nod. Then, to Bakugou he asked: “Are your parents still meeting us there?”

For just a glorious moment, he had almost, *almost*, forgotten that they would be required to attend. Why couldn’t this have happened a few months later when he would be over 18 and not legally required to have his hand held everywhere he went?

“That’s what they said.”

“Good. Nezu and whichever solicitor he’s managed to get his paws on will also be meeting us there. I imagine he’ll have managed to get an exceptionally good one, so that’s something at least.”



Katsuki wouldn't consider himself an expert on how lawyers and inquiries worked, no matter how much he looked into it; it was all far too complicated to fully understand from a Google search alone. However, one thing he did understand was the eye-watering cost of legal representation, especially if you wanted someone who was actually likely to get you the outcome you wanted.

He had seen the viral interview of Asumi's parents, like everyone else at this point it seemed, and his mind focused sharply on the memory of their admission of their financial struggles. Would they have been expected to find a lawyer? Could the side they were arguing against - the advocacy groups made up of volunteers and the poverty-stricken parents of a dead young woman - even hope to compete against the absolute juggernaut that was the most prestigious Hero institution in the world who also had support from the remaining embers of the Provisional Hero Public Safety Commission?

It was obvious the system needed reforming but could it be possible that the side of the Heroes could essentially *pay* to have the issues swept under the rug? *Would* they pay to have the issues swept under the rug?

Katsuki felt his face harden as he made a very quick, but very firm decision.

Even if this didn't change things. Even if U.A. and the PHPSC managed to make this go away, and keep the status quo unchanged de jure, he would start to make that change himself de facto. He didn't give a shit what he had to do. He could become the Number One Hero to make enough income through a large salary and royalties to fund organisations to help as many vulnerable people as possible. He could volunteer every spare minute he had working for these organisations to make a difference. He would even, *God help him*, travel around schools or something - he didn't fucking know - and educate the little brats on how to avoid falling into the same traps people like Asumi.

He could actually be a *real* Hero who helped *everyone* and maybe start to atone for what he had done, and what Hero culture had allowed to happen.

He could probably drag some other extras from 2A with him to help and maybe, *just maybe*, other future Hero students would want to make a difference too.

Or maybe he was getting too ahead of himself and being far too optimistic.

Or maybe, the inquiry would decide he needed to go to prison.

He wouldn't be able to do *any* of that from a jail cell.

His face lost any hopeful tension at the thought, and he closed his eyes as his stomach jolted with nausea again. Luckily, the car was rolling to a stop, which helped.

The car parked in one of the drop-off spaces right in front of the small courthouse, and Katsuki took a moment to relish the cold breeze on his sweaty face.

"Remember. This isn't a trial, Bakugou," Aizawa's low voice paused him as he snapped off his seatbelt, "It's an investigation. Just be honest and let the experts figure it out from there."

"Then what's the lawyer there for?" He questioned, refusing to look anywhere but straight ahead of him.

“The solicitor is there to try and make sure it doesn’t result in one for you and to ensure the Chair is as independent and unbiased as possible. They’ll also deal with any legal paperwork and help us submit written evidence and statements... that kind of thing.”

He appreciated the honesty.

“Who’s the Chair? A Judge?”

“Before the War, it would have been someone from the HPSC but obviously not anymore. It’s someone appointed by the government - completely independent from professional Heroism.”

“The government? That’s... that’s pretty significant.”

*What the hell was he walking into?*

“Between you and me,” Aizawa said quietly, as they pushed past the few reporters and photographers who had figured out where the inquiry was taking place, “I think this is going to become much bigger than just you and Asumi. You’ll be a very small part in all of this once it’s all over and people will mostly look back on this specific incident as nothing more than a catalyst for reform. The world needs rebuilding - starting with the place Heroes have in it and the role they play.”

“She was more than just a catalyst,” Katsuki growled, feeling a sudden flash of irritation and defensiveness, “she was a person.”

“I know, kid.”

His tone was about as close to sympathy as Aizawa seemed physically capable of managing and, whilst Katsuki *hated* it, he was satisfied that the underground Hero seemed to understand that Asumi was more than just a *poster child* or a *villain*, but an actual person too.

They were practically only halfway through the large doors that led to the reception desk before the first thing went wrong.

They weren't alone in the open space - there were two other people already there, signing in at the desk they were walking towards.

The shorter of the two, a woman with familiar bobbed hair and tired eyes happened to look behind her.

Recognition immediately slammed into him like a solid punch from One For All, and his carefully controlled nausea suddenly leapt into his throat. He immediately slapped a fist over his mouth and, without a word, frantically ran blindly until he slammed into a door that was clearly marked as a bathroom.

He promptly collapsed over the sink, knees slamming with bruising force into the cabinet beneath and his shaking hands the only thing stopping him from face planting the floor as he vomited violently into the drain. His heart battered his ribs as tears of shock ran down his face.

*Shit shit shit shit SHIT SHIT.*

He knew he would have to face them eventually, but he was expecting

more of a build-up - a warning before he would have to look them in the eyes.

He groaned and spat again as his stomach tried valiantly to rebel once more, as if he needed reminding from his internal organs just how absolutely *fucked* this whole situation was.

Trying to catch his breath between heaves was becoming problematic, and dark spots began wavering in his vision as the lights suddenly became blinding. He could feel his lungs flapping pathetically as he tried to catch air, but it wasn't working.

He nearly left a foot in the air when he felt a large hand firmly plant itself on his back.

“What the fu-” he managed to rasp, before gagging over the sink again.

“Bakugou. You’re panicking.”

*No fucking shit.*

“Calm down.”

*Real fucking helpful, thanks.*

“Breathe.”

His back was being rubbed in an infuriating rhythm, but, annoyingly, it *was* useful to have a pattern to force his breaths to follow.

After a few seconds that seemed more like hours, he felt himself being led away from the sink and pushed against a cold wall. The same firm hand pressed itself sternly on his shoulder, until his knees took the hint and lowered him to the floor.

His head was still swimming and kept throwing him back to seeing a pair of exhausted, devastated eyes, partially hidden behind a blocky fringe.

He felt his breaths pick up again but before he could fully lose his shit, a familiar voice spoke over him.

“Five things you can see.”

“What?” he forced out between gritted teeth.

“Five things you can see.”

That was not a tone to fuck with.

“Uh...” he took as deep a breath as he could to support his trembling voice, “Uh... fucking...” his eyes rolled a little uncontrollably around the room, “A... a door.”

“Good.”

A fist was lifted from the frigid tile it was tensed on and pressed against a broad chest. It moved in an exaggerated pattern.

“Follow my breaths. What else can you see?”

He tried to do as he was told - he knew authority when he heard it and also, not being able to breathe properly was becoming painful.

He felt his tie being tugged looser and his top button yanked open one-handedly. It helped.

“Uh...” his vision was starting to sharpen again, very slowly. He breathed in again. “Light. Sink. Bin.”

He finally forced his sight to the person in front of him, gazing at him intensely with a concerned, black eye.

They didn’t make him as uncomfortable as they should have done.

“Aizawa.”

The tightness around those black eyes relaxed slightly. He looked relieved.

“Good. Four things you can feel.”

"I don't fucking -" he panted, cut off by his shortness of breath, "... floor... fucking freezing. Wall. Uh. Collar..." A hand undid a second button. "... Breaths."

"Good. Three things you can hear."

The world was starting to trickle back, piece by gross piece as he finally recognised he was sat on the floor of a public bathroom.

"Clock. Pipes..." He thought about it. "My heart. In my ears."

"Two things you can smell."

"... I'd rather not."

"Fair enough. One thing you can taste."

"This morning's regurgitated breakfast."

"Delightful."

"You asked."

"I have gum in my pocket."

"Thanks."



The bathroom was silent for a few minutes as Katsuki regained the last of his composure and mourned the last dregs of his dignity as they disappeared right along with, no doubt, Aizawa's last remaining patience and respect.

He let his head hit the wall with a thump as he slumped back, suddenly very tired.

"You good?"

Aizawa, ever the man of inspirational pep talks and motivational speeches.

"Sure."

"Get up, then."

Katsuki opened one eye to see a palm practically in his face, waiting for him to take it to be hoisted onto his feet.

His panic started to rise again at the idea of going back out and facing the sheer *embarrassment* of losing *his* cool in front of two people whose *daughter* had just been killed. Whose daughter *he* had killed.

"*Killed and not murdered?*" Asumi's voice piped up somewhere in the back of his mind.

*“Killed and not murdered.”* He thought back at her.

*“You owe it to them to face them. You owe it to me. You’re so lucky,”* she sighed, *“I wish I could speak to them the way that you can today.”*

“Bakugou.”

He snapped back to reality. The hand was still there, unwavering. He clasped it tightly and allowed himself to be pulled to his feet. He stumbled a little once upright but quickly straightened himself, his face tight.

“Buttons back up, tie on properly.” His teacher instructed with impressive neutrality, “Facing the consequences of our actions is part of being a Hero. Get out there and show them how a real one should behave now and in the future.”

He nodded, and he reached over to the faucet to splash some cold water in his face. Button. Tie.

He appreciated the lack of coddling. Aizawa had a job to do: get the kid to stop fucking freaking out and get him to his fucking seat.

And Bakugou had a job to do.

To start laying the foundations of Hero reform.

How hard could it be?

## Chapter End Notes

Quick reminder of the 'unreliable narrator' tag here - of course Aizawa isn't just there because he has to be to keep Bakugou in check, he's there because he cares. He reassures Bakugou because he cares. Nearly everything he is doing in this story so far is because he cares, very deeply, about his students and the people he's meant to protect... but mostly his students. But Bakugou isn't necessarily going to see it like that. Just to be super clear there - just because Bakugou (or whoever's perspective I'm working from) thinks something is true, that might not actually be the case :)

Having said that.... strap yourself in for some more Kaminari next chapter!

Thank you for reading, have a lovely rest of your week! :D

# Chapter 11

## Chapter Notes

I did try to make this a Bakugou-free chapter but... my hand slipped? Idk, he's just fascinating to write and surprisingly easy too compared to Izuku who I REALLY struggle with for some reason.

Anyway. Thank you for the kudos and comment - they slipped a lot last chapter which makes me worry that I'm doing something wrong!! Please do drop a comment or some concrit once you've finished reading. I can't even tell you how much your feedback means and I will respond to every single one <3

Thanks for sticking with me this long - enjoy some more Masaru, Kaminari and a lil bit of Deku too!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Class that day felt notably thin on the ground - Bakugou was away with Aizawa and Midoriya still wasn't back. Todoroki still hadn't mentally checked back into the building, and Iida had become almost aggressive in his duties as class rep since returning which was getting a bit weird.

Kaminari sighed and scribbled a stickman idly on a scrap of paper that would usually have been used to pass notes to Kirishima, or to toss subtly (when everyone was focusing on their work in front of them) at Bakugou to bounce off his spikes. He would quickly turn around to innocently face the front to avoid certain violence at lunchtime, but struggle to contain the giggles threatening to burst from his cheeks as he snuck small glances at Bakugou's absolutely feral glares at every single member of the class as he tried to work out just who would even *dare* to bother him during a test.

Of course, it only took three more repeats of that for Bakugou to finally corner him in the common room and threaten him very clearly, and with a frightening look of calm *rage* on his face, that if he did that again, he would blow up his prized pre-quirk comic book collection

*and* his hair when he least expected it. He had also burned up his homework in front of him to demonstrate that his threat was serious, meaning he was in detention for the rest of the week whilst he rewrote it.

It was worth every second of boredom in detention and every flash of genuine terror every time Bakugou caught his eye and slowly dragged a thumb across his throat in an unspoken warning.

It was fun!

Until he started to question just how serious Bakugou's threats had been.

He had provoked someone who actually ended up killing someone.

"Kaminari!" He snapped to attention as Ectoplasm called him out on letting his mind wander.

"Uh. Yes sir?"

"If Ai takes a number, raises it to the power of four, adds ten and gets a result of 26, what was her original number?"

Crap, he'd lost track of the question at 'power of four'.

"Uh..."

He could feel a few eyes on the back of his head, waiting for him to reply and stop holding the class up. Out of the corner of his eye, he was somewhat aware of other students starting to raise their hand to answer instead.

*Just make it up and he'll move on.*

“... T-two?”

Ectoplasm looked impressed, and the others put their hands down.

Did he get it right??

“Very good.” Ectoplasm turned back to write on the board, with steps to get to the answer. “... and  $x$  to the power of 4 is sixteen, meaning  $x$  does indeed equal two. Well done, Kaminari. Iida - if  $K$  is such that...”

Kaminari let out a sigh of relief and automatically turned around to Kirishima to celebrate his victory. Normally, he'd be there ready with a thumbs up or a high five, but this time, Kirishima seemed completely focused on his notebook, scribbling down what Ectoplasm had written on the board.

Ok, he guessed that was fair enough. They were in class after all, and maybe Kirishima was taking notes for Bakugou? He would definitely want to make sure they were good if *he* had been tasked with passing work onto him.

The small rejection still hurt..

“Facing the front, Kaminari.”

School was so hard.

\*\*\*

“The inquiry starts today,” All Might stated conversationally as he helped fold up clothes and stack notebooks to be stashed away in Izuku’s overnight bag.

“I know.” Izuku replied with a sigh as he gingerly shrugged a hoodie over his still-sensitive chest, “I wonder how it’s going.”

“It’ll be fine,” All Might replied, reassuring, “Inquiries are just there to hear what really happened and work out how to stop such things from happening again. Once Young Bakugou’s said his part, and you and the others have spoken if you’re asked to, it’s just a case of waiting to hear the outcome.”

“Right.” Izuku grimaced, and took over the pile of clothes All Might was working on, sliding them into the bag himself. All Might respectfully backed off at this, taking a seat and allowing his successor some independence and privacy, even if it was just in the form of packing his own belongings.

The truth was, Izuku was *worried*.

He had been beyond thrilled when All Might had come back from his evening at U.A. laden with gifts and messages from his classmates: another melon from Mineta and Kaminari; a second playlist from Jirou; some sparkly nail varnish from Aoyama, which he had used to dab onto the sketch of his costume in his hero notebook to really demonstrate its shine; a huge tupperware box filled with cakes and

mochi from Satou, and a box of expensive teas from Yayourozu to name a few. The centrepiece truly had been the large scrapbook that Ururaka had compiled, stuffed with more pictures than he ever remembered taking or being a part of, and full of messages in twenty different styles of handwriting - she had somehow even managed to get Shinsou to write a very short, and clearly somewhat begrudging note of: ‘ *Stop slacking and get back to school so we can fight.* ’ which made him smile far wider than it probably should have done.

In true Midoriya fashion, he had immediately burst into tears at the first page - a double spread of Class 2-A. All Might had jumped at the sudden fountain, looking frantic, but Izuku quickly reassured him that “*it’s happy tears, promise*” through a nose full of snot and a choked up throat.

However, the middle page immediately plugged those tears, as he stared in shock at what was in front of him.

The heading had matched the rest of the scrapbook, clearly made by Uraraka.

*Bakugou Katsuki* took up a good chunk of the top of the page in careful red calligraphy.

*What on earth...?*

There were three photos on there that had been taken during their time at U.A., mostly candid and competitive - anyone could have found them, printed them off, and stuck them in. What made him stop was the fact that the rest of the two pages were taken up by pictures that *had* to have come from Kacchan. And there was no way that Kacchan would allow anyone else to even see, let alone stick in, photos of himself as a younger child.



And the handwriting that littered the gaps in between was most definitely his.

He had made this.

*“Kacchan...”*

At his whispered word, and the sudden lack of weeping, All Might had looked over his shoulder. His jaw had also dropped a little, though he was better at hiding his surprise.

“I’ve always said you had a good childhood friend in Young Bakugou.” He had simply said after studying the page for a second, smiling softly at one picture of the two of them as four-year-olds, in homemade All Might costumes as they span across the park together, “It’s nice to see him continuing to prove me right.”

At that, All Might had excused himself - to get a coffee, or to go for a walk... Izuku hadn’t really been paying attention, but he nodded his acknowledgement anyway and continued scouring through the pages.

The first day they had met at preschool: one of their moms had taken a picture from a short distance as they battled each other with lumps of playdough that vaguely resembled heroes with very questionable and buky capes. Underneath this photo, Kacchan had scrawled *‘Starting as I mean to go on: crushing you.’*

The next photo showed a teary Izuku looking sadly at his squished hero as Kacchan’s reigned supreme over him. Izuku felt his face break into a grin - about five seconds after this photo was taken, Kacchan had squashed his own hero, discarded it on the table with the same

disregard as one would toss a banana peel, and grabbed Izuku's hand to drag him over to the sandpit.

*"If you stop crying,"* he had said, already husky with his token aggression (if about three octaves higher than he spoke now), *"we can play Heroes and Villains and you can be All Might."*

Izuku had stopped crying instantly.

*"But only for five minutes! All Might is the best hero and I'm gonna be the best hero so I should get to be All Might too!"*

In another photo, they were in their preschool jumpers, but this time at the park sharing a swing. Izuku had to chuckle at the signature outraged frown that already screwed up Kacchan's chubby face as Izuku looked like there was no place in the world he would rather be than next to his friend on the swingset. He was smiling blindly at the camera, every single tiny milk tooth bared in his wide grin.

One at Kacchan's fourth birthday. They weren't the only two in this but Izuku barely remembered the others there as, apart from one child with a wing mutation - *Tsubasa* his mind supplied - everyone else eventually went to a different primary school. Despite the crowd of children to choose from, Izuku was the one Kacchan had chosen to stand next to as he blew out the candles on his All Might cake.

Another at the beach with melting ice creams, shin deep in a rock pool with their buckets and spades close by. Another with the two of them proudly displaying the bugs they had caught in the woods. Another in their school uniforms on their first day at primary school. They had walked together with their moms, leaving them behind as they ran off together hand-in-hand, bookbags flying and fluttering behind them in the wind as the sky hazed over with unseasonable clouds.

Kacchan's quirk had come in the next day.

There were no more photos after that date until the ones taken at U.A.

That last photo caused a prong of sadness to prick his heart.

But there was more.

A slip of paper, maybe something that had been doodled on in the middle of a lesson. The sketching was clearly done with a young hand, maybe by a child who was eight or nine years old, at a guess. On the top half was a crude prototype of Kacchan's final hero costume, carefully annotated.

*'Terrifying mask. Scary gauntlets - sweat storage too? Badass knee pads. Red black boots with STEEL toes - good for kicking Deku's ass protection.'*

Underneath, was a less-carefully drawn but still recognizable sketch of what Izuku could only guess was him, in a teal jumpsuit that looked startlingly close to his own original costume, when he had first started at U.A. It had been scribbled over with a wonky cross.

Underneath, the note said *'I always knew you'd end up a hero. Really pissed me off.'*

The final addition to the page was a newspaper clipping - a short article towards the middle of a broadsheet newspaper detailing the

Sludge Villain's attack - there was a small box with a picture of Kacchan being praised by the heroes, with Izuku being scolded in the background. Only Kacchan had been mentioned by name.

Underneath was a simple ‘ *Thanks, nerd.* ’

By the time All Might returned with his mother in tow, having run into her in the lobby, the book had been very carefully rewrapped, and with all the care that was usually afforded to a newborn baby, placed gently in the bottom of his overnight bag.

Said bag was currently being filled up with clothes, his Switch, his books and everything else he had collected during his stay at the hospital. He would be lucky if he had enough space to fit everything in. The heaviest thing in his possession, however, still remained the heavy chain that had settled itself around his heart, made only worse by the residual ache that just wouldn't shift after his injury and subsequent sickness.

There were several things on his mind.

Firstly, if this was his level of discomfort after a single stab wound, how on earth did All Might cope on a daily basis? His injuries must be *agonising*. The thought made him cringe.

His mother kept shooting him glances like she was expecting him to spontaneously jump into a fatal fight with a villain before her very eyes right in the middle of his hospital room which simply made him feel guiltier than he already did for letting her down and making her worry *yet again*.

But, above all of that, he felt a gut-churning worry for Kacchan, who he still hadn't actually spoken to since the... incident in the alleyway.

Maybe it wouldn't have even happened if he hadn't decided to go to that agency in the first place.

"Stop that." All Might chided lightly, looking at Izuku like he was reading a book.

He jumped as his thought process was interrupted.

"Stop what?"

"Blaming yourself. It won't help anyone."

Izuku sighed, "Is it that obvious?"

"I can hear your mind ticking from over here, kid," All Might smiled, "You also really have absolutely no awareness when you speak your thoughts out loud, do you?"

Izuku instinctively clapped a hand over his mouth. Had he just *said* all of that?

"Izuku," his mother began, looking at him imploringly with her large viridian eyes. She took his hands. "Are you sure you won't come home with me? You don't have to go back to U.A. straight away - you can come home and *rest*. I worry you'll overstretch yourself trying to fix everything by yourself and I won't be there to take care of you."

Izuku gave her a wet and wobbly smile. Whilst he would have desperately loved to have indulged his mother by going home, he needed to be able to help Kacchan.

“Mom, I’ll be fine,” he reassured her softly, reaching down to brush a tear from her cheek, “I’ll only have classes Friday and Saturday morning - then I have Sunday to relax or to come home if I need to.”

“Izuku...” she said again, in a very small voice.

For a split second, he thought she might insist, or worse, *beg* for him to go home with her but she seemed to pull herself together at the last minute. She cleared her throat and composed herself by wiping the remaining tears from her cheeks, as her face pulled into something of a stern look.

“Make sure you do everything the doctors tell you and you don’t do anything too strenuous,” she instructed, “and *call* me the second you feel like you need to come home.”

“I will, mom, I promise.”

All Might took that as his cue to step in - he placed a large hand gently on his shoulder, “I’ll keep an eye on him, too. Don’t worry. He’ll be well looked after.”

His mother’s eyes continued to shine but she eventually nodded.

“I drove back here after stopping at U.A., rather than taking the train,” he added, “I can drop you off at your house before taking Young Izuku back to the dorms with me so you can have a little more

time together.”

She nodded again, graciously, “I would appreciate that, thank you.”

And with that, with his sheets neatly folded at the bottom of the bed, and a whole melon and a small box of expensive tea left on the bedside table with a thank you note to the staff, Izuku found himself sighing with relief as they signed the discharge papers and walked out to the car park.

He could finally do his bit to make things right.

\*\*\*

**“The first day of the public inquiry into the death of Bushida Asumi has begun today, with scenes being shown exclusively here tonight of Bakugou Katsuki and his teacher, the pro-Hero Eraserhead, entering the Musutafu Civil Courthouse earlier this morning. The participants in the investigation so far have been very tight-lipped, but there have been rumours of an emotional breakdown by Mr. Bakugou when he saw Bushida’s parents for the first time. Is this indicative of genuine guilt and remorse or simply an act for the cameras? Has he been coached by Eraserhead to appear emotional and child-like to garner sympathy for the Pro-hero cause? Our behaviour expert, Gushikin Naoki, is here with us today. Naoki, could you tell us your thoughts on-”**

The T.V. powered off unexpectedly with a click of the remote behind him.

Kaminari spun around, anticipating that a wrestling match over the control with Mineta was imminent, before pausing as he came

practically nose-to-nose with Kirishima.

He looked uncharacteristically tense - his brows were pulled in, giving him a slightly pained expression.

“Why do you keep watching this crap, dude?”

He sounded pained too.

Kaminari gaped at him for a second, unsure as to what to say.

“He’s our *friend*, Kaminari,” He continued, the pain giving way to something more irritated, “Imagine if he came home and this was on - how that would make him feel.”

“How that would make him *feel*?” Kaminari echoed, completely unintentionally. He couldn’t help it. The tension and confusion and lack of sleep over the last few days already had him at breaking point; the unexpected confrontation simply tipped him over the edge. “Maybe if *he* worried a bit more about how *he* made people feel, he might not be in this mess.”

*Shit, he’d done it now.*

Kirishima had backed away at this like the words had physically smacked him, looking genuinely shocked.

“What are you talking about?” He demanded. “This wasn’t his fault! What the hell are you saying?”



His voice was growing louder again with each word.

Others mingling in the common room started to stop what they were doing and peering over to the commotion. Mina grimaced and started to slowly approach them.

“I’m saying that maybe, *maybe*, they’re right. Maybe he was wrong. Maybe the Heroes are wrong. Maybe he *is* a murderer, man, I don’t even know any-”

He broke off as Kirishima seemed to snap. Mina gave a yelp of alarm as for a sick, dizzying second, she thought that Kirishima might actually hit him, before she remembered that this was *Kirishima* and, no matter how furious he was, he would never actually hurt his friends. He stopped dead in front of Kaminari again.

“How could you say that?”

The anger was giving way to frustration and hurt once more and the tips of his fingers started to harden instinctively and involuntarily as his distress grew. He seemed to be battling between a righteous and defensive anger on behalf of his friend, exhaustion from trying to help said friend and genuine devastation at Kaminari’s opinion.

Kaminari was agitatedly running a hand through his hair, disturbing the back lightning bolt that was usually immaculately in place. “I’m sorry,” he garbled, “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean... I just... I’m so *confused*. I don’t know what to think anymore. If this is being a Hero, I don’t think I want any part of it, Kirishima. It’s not right. None of this is *right*.”

He backed away, until his knees hit the sofa and he collapsed heavily into it, still running a shaking hand through his hair.

A tense silence hung between them.

“He’s punished himself enough,” Kirishima eventually said through gritted teeth, “He doesn’t need anyone else doing it for him.”

He seemed to acknowledge the rest of the common room staring at him and he faltered, his cheeks flushing.

“I’m gonna go to the gym ‘til he gets back,” He muttered as he walked very firmly to the front door, keeping his eyes glued to his feet as he went, refusing to look at his silently shocked classmates.

Almost immediately, Kaminari stood up and wordlessly headed for the stairs.

The silent spell was broken when the front door slammed behind Kirishima.

“... Dude.” Jirou commented, looking incredibly uncomfortable.

“What the heck just happened?” Uraraka rhetorically asked, her jaw practically inches from the floor.

Mina seemed to make a decision after looking between the stairwell and the main entrance. She grabbed Kaminari’s discarded phone, and started a heavy ascension up the stairs with a sigh.

The students murmured amongst themselves until a few minutes later, the front door re-opened and shut again. Everyone immediately silenced, heads whipping to the door, expecting to see Kirishima or Bakugou but instead, standing in the front door with All Might beside him carrying his shoulder bag, was Midoriya Izuku.

He was smiling, but clearly sensed the tension in their air immediately. His grin started to drop and pull into a frown.

“Hey guys,” he greeted with a small wave, “What did I miss?”

\*\*\*

*A few hours earlier.*

“I’m fine.”

“Drink the water.”

Katsuki scowled as his hand darted out and gripped the plastic bottle Aizawa was shoving in his face. They were sat in two worn seats that were upholstered with distressed chartreuse green faux leather and framed with cheap wooden arms and legs. A few other people were scattered around, either sitting silently tapping on laptops or discussing their files quietly.

Asumi's parents were nowhere in sight.

Katsuki sighed in relief and chugged from the bottle, crushing it in one fist once it it empty a little unnecessarily. It felt good though. He shoved it into his shoulder bag, not wanting to drag himself to the bin

in mini corner at the other side of the waiting room.

"This sucks." He griped, slumping in his seat with his hands buried in his pockets.

"Quite," Aizawa agreed, before looking at him out of the corner of his eye. "Would you sit up straight? You look like a delinquent at best, a sulking five-year-old at worst ."

Katsuki pulled a face and earnestly resisted the urge to stick his tongue out at his teacher in retaliation.

"I understand this is difficult," Aizawa said after a moment, not looking up from the phone he was tapping away on, "but you've got to keep it together in there. We owe her that much."

Katsuki couldn't agree more but he didn't dignify Aizawa with a response. Even if he wanted to reply, he wouldn't have had time as, at that very moment, a familiar face came round the corner.

His heart pounded mutely.

*Dad was here.*

Aizawa locked his phone and slipped it into his pocket, standing to greet Bakugou Masaru. Katsuki stayed sat where he was, looking at his father a little warily.

His parent and teacher exchanged a short bow before Masaru took the

empty seat next to his son.

"It's good to see you, Kats."

Worse still than the kind words was the fact that he sounded like he meant it.

"Sure." He swallowed his discomfort. "Where's the old hag?"

Masaru smiled, "We decided it was *probably* for the best that only one of us comes, so you weren't overwhelmed with people -"

"I don't get *overw*-"

"And we both know your mother can struggle to... contain and vocalise her emotions and opinions in a manner that's always appropriate for the setting she's in."

Katsuki scoffed, "She's a fucking banshee is what you mean. She'd make us all look bad."

*As if we need two of us letting the side down.*

"She's a very passionate, fiery woman is all I'll say."

"Gross. Get a room."

"Ah, I'm so pleased to see that you're all already here!" A cheerful, yet very recognisable voice interrupted the conversation, and also caused a small ripple of silence to rip through the waiting room. The people in suits with files and laptops all paused to look at the newcomer with varying degrees of interest, clearly immediately recognising the mouse-dog-bear Principal of U.A. High School.

Nezu smiled and ignored the lingering eyes.

"Principal Nezu," both adults greeted with a deep nod as Bakugou jerked his head in acknowledgement.

Tsukauchi hovered behind him, looking a little frazzled.

"I should go and check in with the rest of my team; you'll be alright?"

"Oh, most certainly, Detective," Nezu reassured, looking up at him with wide, black eyes. "We wouldn't want it to seem like we're collaborating too closely, after all."

"Uh. Right. Good luck, kid." The last part of his sentence was directed quickly, yet not without sincerity at Katsuki, before he whipped off to find the relevant people.

Nezu crawled up into the folds of Aizawa's scarf, Aizawa tilting his head out of his way without comment as he made himself comfortable.

"You'll probably have to speak fairly briefly at the start, to tell your side of the story, Bakugou," Nezu told him with far too much confidence and breeziness to ease Katsuki's nerves, "Once that's over,

you may have to wait out here for a little while as others explain their findings and you may be called back in. Or you may have to wait and be sent home later anyway. I do hope you brought something to keep you busy."

"Uh, sure?"

Nezu smiled that slightly unreadable smile again, the one that didn't quite reach his eyes. "Excellent. I'm sure we won't be waiting long now. Just remember to speak your truth, and all will be well."

With Nezu's words, his father gave his knee an encouraging shake which he immediately brushed off.

He didn't need all this *pity* .

Before he knew it, there was a buzz of movement in the rest of the workers as they started bottoming up blazers, zipping up bags and shuffling files under their arms.

"Oh good, we're beginning." Nezu commented, before climbing back down off Aizawa's shoulder to greet someone filing into the room, presumably his solicitor by the familiar way he was greeted. Nezu walked in with him.

Aizawa flicked his eye at the suited people with a well-hidden glance of mistrust, before turning back to Katsuki.

"They'll do some introductions then likely ask for your statement. Do you have it written down?"

Katsuki watched carefully as the suits filed in through the ornate door that had just been opened before opening the folded piece of paper he had hidden in the breast pocket of his blazer.

"Yeah. It's the one you checked and proofread."

"Good. It'll help to have it in front of you. The police will be there in a reasonably neutral manner but should be able to support what you're saying with their own evidence and witness reports, plus the pro-Heroes' account will help too."

Katsuki's stomach churned with a mixed feeling of anxiety that the time for him to speak was so close along with anticipation to just get the damn thing over with.

"It's alright to be scared, Kats." His father murmured to him, low enough that the others wouldn't hear.

"I'm not *scared*." He bit back instinctively but, at the last suit filed into the room and the door was closed behind them, he realised with a growing clarity that his retort wasn't a lie.

He *wasn't* scared.

He was fucking *terrified*.

But terror made him irate and he restlessly shifted in his chair before making a decision to get the fuck away from the claustrophobic shoulders of his father and teacher. He could practically feel his father



going to stand to come over to him, but Aizawa simply raised a hand and rested it gently on his arm, prompting him to stay in his seat.

Katsuki shoved his headphones in and tried to ignore the way they both spoke in low voices and tried to make it less obvious that they were talking about him.

By the poorly-hidden look of horror on his father's face, he knew they were discussing the bathroom incident.

Great.

His father must be so proud of him.

The seconds ticked by with agonising slowness as he tried to focus his eyes on anything but the single, cheap clock on the wall, whilst simultaneously being far too twitchy and distracted to distract his eyes with his phone, or his notebook instead.

His playlist ended without his realising.

Finally, the door re-opened.

A complete stranger stood in the door, and their mouth moved as they looked directly at him. He turned to Aizawa and his father instinctively as he clocked their movement out of the corner of his eye. They stood and buttoned their blazers.

What was happening?

Suddenly, his father was in front of him, face so close to his that their noses were almost brushing.

*Katsuki was three-years-old again, old enough to remember but still too young to care.*

*Mom put on a false gasp as headlights cast playful shadows on the living room wall.*

*Katsuki immediately dropped his All Might and Crimson Riot action figures on the floor, completely uncaring as to where they would end up as his head streaked towards the window like a meerkat.*

*“Who’s that, Kats!?”*

*“DADDY’S HOME!” he roared as he threw himself to the front door like a grenade, little legs bouncing as he waited impatiently by the welcome mat.*

*He was already leaping into Daddy’s arms before he had even stepped both feet in the doorway.*

*“There’s my little hero!” Daddy beamed, lifting him into the air like he was flying before holding him tightly and rubbing his nose with his, “There’s my little -”*

*“ Katsuki!”*

He blinked.

Suddenly he was 17 again. Old enough to remember and definitely old enough to care.

“What?” He heard himself ask stupidly.

“It’s time to go in.” His father explained, doing up a button on his blazer for him.

The haze lifted just enough for him to swat his father’s hands away before doing up his own bottom button.

“Right.” He said, feeling a bit faint.

They walked towards the door as a three, his father sticking very close to him for as long as he could, before he was led to a viewing seat and Katsuki was led to a table in front of a thousand prying eyes.

Two pairs of black, non-distinct eyes stood out like ghastly beacons.

He swallowed and focused on his father’s as he sat down awkwardly.

His father calmly looked straight back at him.

Katsuki knew he wouldn’t break eye contact until he was sure his son was ready.

*“Don’t let go!” he demanded, as Dad lightly held onto the back of his bicycle seat. He’d be damned if Deku learned to ride his bike without stabilisers before him but he also didn’t fancy dying today, thanks.*

*“I’ll never let you fall.” Was Dad’s oddly poignant response.*

*“Yeah, yeah, push me faster, daddy- I mean, ‘dad’. Dad. Faster!”*

“Would you state your name for everyone and explain your relation in the death of Bushida Asumi?” An emotionless and professional voice was asking.

“Uh,” he still trained his eyes on his father, letting his calm strength fill him. He gradually allowed himself to sit up straighter and look at the speaker. He would not appear weak before anyone. Ever.  
“Bakugou Katsuki. I... I killed Bushida Asumi.”

Mutters erupted amongst the listeners but they were silenced with a glare from who he could only assume was the Chair - a strict-looking woman who looked to be in her fifties, with tightly curled royal blue hair and lipstick of an even darker crimson.

“You were only one of two people there - I was told we would hear from Midoriya Izuku also.”

It was a little jarring to hear Deku’s name.

A weedy looking man sat next to her leaned over and nervously answered her unanswered demand.

“Midoriya’s discharge from the hospital was pushed later than we expected - he won’t be available until tomorrow at the earliest, I’m told.”

*Tomorrow, huh? Did that mean the nerd would be home that evening?*

“Hm.” She didn’t seem happy. “Fine, we’ll make do for now.”

She turned back to Bakugou and plastered on a smile that he could only assume was an expression she thought was comforting and reserved only for children. Thank fuck he wasn’t an actual kid, he would probably have punched her in the face, she looked so monstrous.

*Focus.*

“Katsuki, my name is Igarashi Azuha, the chair of the inquiry into the death of Bushida Asumi. I’d like you to explain, in your own words, what happened on the evening of 15th January, specifically during your encounter with Bushida.”

Bakugou forced his hand to steady and he pulled out the notes he had made earlier, with help from Aizawa. He chanced a glance around the room - a move that made him feel a little motion sick, especially when he recognised Fallacy and Violet Crush looking steadily at him, seeming very out of place out of their hero gear. Their smart suits clashed with their bright hair and eyes.

He cleared his throat and began his story.

## Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please do let me know your thoughts :D

# Chapter 12

## Chapter Notes

This is way shorter than I had planned and it doesn't feel finished, but equally, it's just been sat in my documents for ages and I hate how long I've left this before updating!! So, I thought I'd at least get this up and then go from there, even though it doesn't feel like much happens in this chapter.

Thanks so much for your patience and comments and I apologise for the delay!

I do have another project running alongside this (Hunger of the Pine - check it out!) but neither story will be abandoned for the other :D hopefully updates on this will be a little more regular now that some work pinch points have passed and things are a lot less stressful.

Please enjoy what there is of this, and from now on, we'll be back to regular updates at expected length!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“And that was when... when she... when I...” he cleared his throat, frustrated at how the words twisted in his mouth. He cleared his throat again, glaring at the notes in front of him. He breathed in through his nose, and looked up at the sea of judgemental eyes, pointedly ignoring those of his father, as he finished his sentence far more articulately. “That was when she ran towards De... *Midoriya* and I aimed a blast at her feet.”

He paused, the word ‘Midoriya’ feeling as foreign as poison on his tongue, as he expected a follow up question or an accusation from the Chair.

She merely flicked a wrist at him to carry on as she penned her own notes in the notebook in front of her.

He was quick to comply.

“I aimed a blast at her feet, but everything was... *hazy*. I couldn’t see too well and... I missed.” He chose to focus his gaze on a neutral part of the panelled wall towards the back of the room. “I missed. The explosion caught the back of her head and I... she was dead before she hit the floor.”

“How do you know?”

He jumped, glancing back to the Chair who was finally looking at him, and presenting the first question she had asked since he began his retelling a good five minutes before.

“What?”

“How do you know,” she repeated, “that she was, as you say, *‘dead before she hit the floor’?*”

Bakugou licked his suddenly very dry lips.

“I went to check on her.”

“*Before* Midoriya who, until then, had been your priority?”

It sounded weird when she put it like that.

“Well... yeah. I went to cuff her to make sure she didn’t attack us



while my back was turned.”

“But she was dead.”

That got his back up a little bit - he felt his hands tighten into fists but he forced his anger back down into a very tight corner. “Well... Yeah, I... like I said, I was confused - I thought I’d just knocked her out. It took me a second to realise what had happened.”

“Then how do you know she was dead before she hit the floor?”

*“Because half her fucking skull was caved in!”* He snapped in irritation, but immediately felt shame cloud his cheeks. Christ, her *parents* were in the room, *keep it the fuck together, Katsuki.*

“Mind your language.”

He grunted in acknowledgement, still feeling the heat in his face slowly recede.

“Then what?”

“I... I had to get to Deku.. I mean, Midoriya. He was bleeding everywhere, he couldn’t *breathe* . We just had to sit there and wait for backup.” He took in a deep breath again, trying not to let the image of Deku almost *dying* in front of him take over his already only semi-functioning brain. “Kirishima arrived not long after with the hero Thermostat. I... I don’t really remember much after that.”

“Did you say anything to the heroes about Bushida?”

He blinked hard and tried to force the memory forward, but nothing was forthcoming. He had a vague, dream-like recollection of frustration as he begged Kirishima to do... *something*. But what? Why was it such a big deal?

“I...” he rubbed an eyebrow, “I really can’t remember. I had a concussion.”

“Right.”

More scribbling.

“And after?”

“Uh...” he was really starting to struggle and falter; it was incredibly disconcerting to realise just how much he was physically present for, but not *mentally* present for. Why the fuck couldn’t he just *remember*? “I was in an ambulance... with Kirishima again.”

“Was anything said then?”

He shook his head, “I don’t remember.”

“Nothing at all?”

“Nothing.” He said firmly, and with an air of finality. He really didn’t

have anything more to say that they wouldn't already know.

There was a silence that made Bakugou feel unbelievably self-conscious as the suits and the Chair scribbled or typed away. He swallowed dryly and looked at the table in front of him, memorising every imperfection, dent or score in the wood. He rubbed a thumb over a particularly deep scratch in the varnish and tried to keep his breaths even. His stomach churned.

*Don't throw up. Don't throw up. Don't throw -*

“Bakugou.”

He tore his eyes away from the wood and turned back towards the Chair, holding his breath as his nerves lit up again, warning him to either freeze on the spot or run the fuck away as fast as humanly possible.

“Yeah?”

“Indulge me.” She put her pen down and rested her chin on steepled fingers, her face contorting into that terrible, “child-friendly” smile once more. “How have you reacted to Bushida’s passing?”

He froze, his body’s flight or fight response making a decision for him finally. His jaw tightened involuntarily, and he wouldn’t have been able to open his mouth to reply, even if he had an answer.

She wanted him to explain, in words, to an entire room, how this whole situation had made him *feel*. She wanted him to expose his weaknesses to the entire world when he could barely expose those

weaknesses to himself. Did he even have the words, outside of pride or resentful rage, to even articulate more complex feelings of guilt, wistfulness and utter, soul-destroying grief?

The room looked expectantly at him. He accidentally caught sight of Aizawa's face; he was grimacing, fully comprehending that this was likely the most difficult question they could have put on him.

"Well?"

The Chair was growing impatient.

His mouth opened... then clicked shut again.

He couldn't do it.

Igarashi had a look on her face that he couldn't quite place - it was some sort of hybrid between disappointment, sadness and just a small touch of... disgust? Was she disgusted by him? *No*. More of a complete lack of comprehension as to why, when given the chance, he wouldn't desperately trip over himself in his haste to prove he was remorseful and not guilty of the crime of which he was so close to being formally accused of. Why he wouldn't be quick to prove his humanity to the endless horde of people judging his every word.

"That will be all for your preliminary statement. Thank you for your time, Bakugou, you may leave the stand now."

His feet carried him numbly to the overtly decorated door, which was opened for him by someone he couldn't even acknowledge. Had his father followed him out? Had Aizawa?

*Had he just fucked everything up even more?*

He was vaguely aware of a hand on his shoulder, of a familiar voice telling him, unjustly, that he had done well. That it was over for now.

His legs marched him to the door, and luckily, that seemed to give one of the adults the hint and before he knew it, he had smoothly been deposited in the back of the car that he and his teacher had arrived in. He sat there, lulled by the rumbling of the engine underneath his legs, revelling in the subtle movement as it reminded him that he was no longer sat in a waiting room, in a witness chair, in a hospital room... he had an escape route. The car was small enough to feel cosy and safe, only aided by the tinted black windows. No one could see him here. No one could read him here.

He felt the seat dip as someone heavier joined him, and moved with the sway of the vehicle as they shut the door behind them. He let them adjust a seatbelt over his shoulder, and he appreciated the grateful purr of an engine being permitted into higher gears as they rolled away from that godforsaken room.

He let the conversation wash over him, feeling no inclination or pressure to involve himself in it, even though he knew it was about him and was on a topic he really should give more of a shit about.

He tuned in a little more at the mention of Kirishima.

“... they’ll more than likely want to hear from Kirishima and Midoriya before they speak to him again,” Aizawa was intoning from the front seat, looking over his shoulder at Masaru, “as there are some significant gaps in his memory.”

Masaru shook his head, "I wish she hadn't asked him what she did... he needed time to prepare for something like that." Aizawa inclined his head in agreement, but didn't offer his opinion further: there was nothing he could add about Bakugou that his father didn't already know. It went without saying how poorly his lack of response probably came across to a room of people who didn't know him; if they did know him at all, they would realise that his lack of an emotional response was sign enough that he had been deeply affected by the events that had passed.

But they didn't know him personally - only what they saw in front of them in the inquiry and whatever was plastered in the media or online was the Bakugou Katsuki they knew.

"Take him home, Aizawa," his father eventually said reluctantly, looking very much like he would much rather scoop his only child into his arms and run far away with him, hiding him somewhere the rest of the world could never find him. "Take him back to the dorms. He needs his friends, and I don't imagine my wife is the best person for him to be around right now." He took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes tiredly for a second, before replacing them. "I'll be a phonecall away if he needs anything."

Aizawa said nothing in reply, except direct the chauffeur to return to U.A. via the Bakugou residence, to drop Masaru back home.

\*\*\*

There was a resounding chorus of varying "*Deku!*"s, "*Midoriya!*"s and the odd incoherent squeal as he stood a little awkwardly in the doorway, All Might at his side. All Might chuckled and nudged him forward with a large hand on his lower back towards a class that almost seemed afraid to approach him, lest he break. That concern however was broken with his first step forward, and he found himself with his arms full of Uraraka who had practically thrown herself at him.

He grimaced pre-emptively at the unexpected impact to his unprotected chest, but she was gentle enough to only create a warm and comforting pressure around his shoulders and torso. He let himself bury his face into her strawberry-scented hair as he raised his hands to press against her shoulder blades, returning her hug.

“Deku, we were so worried!” she garbled into his shoulder, before pushing him back and eying him up and down critically, not unlike a mother would to their accident-prone child, “Are you okay?”

He flashed a reassuring smile at her and the rest of the class who had gathered around him, with a few notable exceptions. “I’m fine now, I just need to take it easy.” He replied truthfully, accepting a second, though briefer hug from Iida. Todoroki hung back a little, looking uncertain, but like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders.

“If we’d known you were coming back tonight, we would have made sure to have dinner ready,” Tsu commented, looking a little remorseful, “Sorry, Midoriya. It’s good to see you again.”

Izuku held up his hands and waved them frantically, his ears flushing pink, “No, don’t apologise. I should be thanking you guys! For the gifts! I really appreciated them!”

Yaoyorozu waved him off, “No need to thank us, Midoriya,” she smiled, though she looked pleased at his acknowledgement, “It was the least we could do.”

“You should come and sit down,” Ojirou urged. At some point, he had acquired Izuku’s bag from All Might and had slung it over his own shoulder, “I can take your bag up and put it in front of your room.”

“You really don’t have to-”

“It’s no big deal,” he insisted, already heading to the stairs as Uraraka grabbed his arm gently and pulled him towards one of the couches.

He turned back to All Might over his shoulder, who smiled fondly at the sight of his students.

“I’ll leave you in their good hands, Young Midoriya,” he grinned, “Call me if you need anything.”

He gently extracted himself from Uraraka’s grasp, and hurried over to his mentor before he had a chance to unlock the front door again. The rest of the class made their way to the couches to wait for him, and give the two some semblance of privacy.

All Might looked at him patiently and waited for him to speak.

“I, uh...” he stammered, suddenly a little self-aware, “I wanted to thank you. You know, for staying with me and taking care of my mom... you didn’t have to do all that and, well, it means a lot. So, thank you.”

He dropped into a small bow, and was surprised when All Might chuckled and pulled him into a gentle hug of his own, tucking the crown of his head under his chin.

“You don’t have to thank me for anything, Young Midoriya,” he said softly, so only he could hear his words, “I’m just so glad you’re safe.”



He released him after a few seconds, before smiling warmly at him once again and saying his good nights, before heading out into the cool, dark evening towards the teachers' dorms.

Izuku locked the door behind him and took a second to brace himself - it had been a while since he had to socialise with so many people at once and, as glad as he was to see his friends, it was a little overwhelming. He took as deep a breath as he could manage with his still sore lungs, before turning back to join his classmates.

Uraraka shoved insistently at Iida's shoulder (who gave a slightly offended squawk) to make a space for Izuku right next to her. He smiled and took the hint. It was clear she had genuinely missed him - the thought made a warm, comforting emotion rise up in his chest that he couldn't quite place.

Having grown up with no friends whatsoever (the closest thing to one being Kacchan who took great pleasure in making his life as miserable as possible for a good ten years), he couldn't quite put into words how *grateful* he was to have met such an amazing group of people. It was an honour to even call them his acquaintances, let alone friends.

Some of those friends, however, were missing, noticeable even as Ojirou rejoined them and sat cross-legged on the floor next to Koda and Tokoyami, as all the sofa space was now taken up.

"Where're Ashido and Kaminari?" he asked, as he gingerly took a seat with a small wince, "And are Kacchan and Kirishima at the inquiry?"

The underlying tension that still lingered in the atmosphere beneath the temporary lightness of their happiness at Izuku's return immediately thickened the mood once more. It was so palpable, Izuku caught onto it immediately.

Jirou fiddled with her earlobes, twisting them around her fingers, unravelling them, and twisting them again. "Kirishima went to go wait for Bakugou at the gym. Kaminari and Ashido are upstairs."

Izuku frowned. The group usually came and went as a package deal, and he would have assumed that Kaminari and Ashido wouldn't have wanted to miss Bakugou's arrival after the first day of the inquiry, no matter how foul-tempered and sour-faced he might be at their existence by the time he got back.

He looked over at Sero who he noticed had been particularly quiet - his lips were pursed shut, clearly not in the mood to give anything away or contribute towards any gossip about his friends.

"...Did something happen?"

"Kaminari and Kirishima had a... falling out." Uraraka finally explained, poking her fingers together a little awkwardly. "Kirishima stormed out and Ashido followed Kaminari to his room."

"It was pretty intense," Jirou contributed.

Izuku's eyes practically fell out of his head - the closeness of their friendship and their general personalities meant that he couldn't even *imagine* one antagonising the other at all, let alone to the point of an actual argument, *let alone* one significant enough that someone would actually walk out over it reasonably late into the evening.

His shocked response was cut off by Aizawa's timely entrance - he looked just as exhausted as ever, but his face was carefully neutral as every head in the room turned to see who had opened the door.

“It’s good to see you back, Midoriya,” he greeted, with a nod towards his student before he addressed the rest of the class. “I just wanted to let you all know that Bakugou is back; he’s in the gym with Kirishima, so I don’t want any of you hellions waking me up in a panic because you don’t know where he is.”

“How... how did it go?” Sero piped up hesitantly, the first instance that he had drawn attention to himself since Izuku’s return.

“Bakugou will share that with you if and when he wants to - it’s not for me to share...” he fixed a warning gaze on the group of teenagers as he finished his sentence, “... and it’s not for any of you to pry.”

The class nodded with a quiet chorus of ‘ *right* ’ s and ‘ *yessir* ’ s.

Aizawa glanced down at his watch, “You should all be heading to bed soon - none of this excuses poor performance due to tiredness tomorrow if you end up staying up late.”

Iida nodded with a particularly strict aggression at this, clearly preparing himself to send the others to bed the minute Aizawa left the common room.

“Midoriya, I need to speak to you privately,” he said with some finality, “the rest of you: I’ll see you bright and early tomorrow morning.”

The rest of the class did as they were told, with some poking and direction from Iida (that was mostly ignored) as Izuku headed over to Aizawa, feeling a little unsure. He had literally only just arrived back home - what could he possibly have done in that time to have caused a problem?

“How are you feeling?” He asked, with no preamble, once Izuku was within hearing distance.

“I’m fine.” If his response sounded a little short because he was exhausted of hearing the same question over and over again today, Aizawa didn’t react to it.

“Good to hear. You’ve been summoned to the inquiry tomorrow, as has Kirishima. I’ve already informed him.”

“Already?”

Aizawa pursed his lips, as if considering how much information to reveal. Eventually he settled on: “They were always going to want to corroborate your stories anyway and there are... some gaps in Bakugou’s recollection that are best filled in by the two of you.”

Izuku screwed up his nose in confusion, “But I probably remember even less than he does to be honest, sir.”

Aizawa inhaled deeply, looking somewhat regretful, “I think, in all honesty Midoriya, there’ll be more to it than that. How long have you known Bakugou now?”

His mind immediately flashed back to the scrapbook that Kacchan had clearly spent hours on, and his absolute shock at the kind gesture. “Uh... since we were about two-years-old. What does that have to do with anything?”

“It’s not been confirmed but... I feel like you may also be used as a character reference.”

“... Oh.”

“Quite. You can’t lie, of course. And I imagine there were a few years between you that were less than friendly, including your first year at U.A.”

“I won’t speak against him.”

“You may not have a choice.”

“He’s changed!” Izuku argued, “ And... and the way he acted was never because he was actually cruel but because of-”

“You’re preaching to the converted, kid.” Aizawa cut him off, “Do you think you can convince a room full of people convinced he’s a villain of what we know to be the truth?”

Izuku paused and thought intently with a frown. Aizawa placed a hand briefly on his shoulder, bringing him sharply back to reality.

“Look. Don’t lose too much sleep over this, Problem Child,” he began. “You’ll need all the energy you can get to be prepared. But... do spend a little time tonight and tomorrow morning fine-tuning what you need to say. I trust you’ve already been planning your side of the story since you heard the inquiry was taking place?”

“Of course.”

A ghost of a proud smile flickered on his teacher's face, before it was immediately trained back into purely exhausted neutrality once more. “Good. Get some rest; All Might will be taking the three of you in the morning at about eight am. Wear a suit. Ask All Might to fix that godforsaken tie before anyone in that hearing sees you.”

Izuku nodded determinedly, “Right!”

Once more, a faintly proud smile adorned his features, before he turned on his heel without another word and headed towards the dim lights of the teachers dorms. A light tap on his shoulder made him jump a little and spin round to the source.

Todoroki was looking flatly right back at him, a steaming mug of green tea held out to him. He accepted it with a smile, “Thanks.”

“It's good to see you, Midoriya.”

“It's good to see you too.”

“I hope you don't mind that I overheard some of your conversation with Mr. Aizawa.”

Izuku smiled wider and took a sip of his tea, “It's fine, we weren't exactly being subtle.”

Todoroki seemed to struggle with his next few words, his mouth

forming them very carefully after a few seconds of consideration, “If you would like, I could help you finish off some of your statement for tomorrow... or at the very least, offer you some company while you finish what you’ve started,” he offered, a faint flush dusting his cheeks.

“You don’t have to do that, Todoroki,” Izuku insisted, a matching flush painting his entire countenance, “You’ve helped me more than enough these last couple of weeks.”

His friend shook his head, his fringe brushing into his eyes, “You’ve done nothing but help me since we met,” he said, with an intensity that made Izuku pause his slightly awkward shuffling. “Please allow me to return the favour. I’ve... missed having you in the dorms with us.”

And Izuku could understand that: understand the drive to help, the need to return a perceived debt and the overwhelming need for company when things weren’t quite right.

“That sounds great, Shouto,” he said warmly, “Thank you.”

\*\*\*

“I don’t need you to fight my battles for me, Shitty-Hair.”

Bakugou sat on the seat of a rowing machine, idly running his feet back and forth so it gently slid with his movements. His shirt was untucked, his tie was already stuffed somewhere deep into his blazer pocket, and his hair seemed more explosive than usual, fringe framing a pair of bruised-looking eyes.

He sounded as tired as he looked, but there was just enough of a hint of offence in his tone that it made Kirishima pause rolling up his gym

mat.

“He was wrong to say what he did, Bakugou,” he argued, looking up at him from where he sat on his knees, “It wouldn’t be very manly of me to not...”

“I don’t need your help,” he growled and Kirishima had to smile at that.

“I know you don’t, but you’re my best friend,” he continued rolling up his mat, “It would be wrong for me to hear someone bad-mouth you and not call them out on it.”

“Isn’t he your best friend too?”

The question hung awkwardly between them; the lack of aggression on Bakugou’s part, complete with accusations of Kirishima thinking he was weak or somehow better than him by standing up for him, was painfully noticeable and made navigating the conversation difficult.

“Yeah,” he said eventually, “Of course but... friends have a responsibility to call each other out when they’re wrong, right?”

“You never called me out when I was wrong.”

“Sure I did.”

“Not like that.”



Kirishima didn't really have an answer for that as he snapped the elastic holder around the mat and returned it to its hiding place in one of the stock cupboards.

"Besides," Bakugou carried on eventually, "He's not wrong."

"Stop saying things like that, man."

Bakugou sighed, starting to gain a familiar, irritable edge to his expression, "No. I can't believe these words are coming out of my fucking mouth but... Dunc-Face isn't being a complete idiot this time. We *should* question Hero's accountability and their place now the war is over." He kicked himself back so the bench slowly rolled itself all the way to its starting position like a slide. "What's more of a problem is how many of the extras *don't* see how much has changed."

Kirishima sat himself cross-legged in front of the rowing machine, "Okay," he replied calmly, "Okay, I see your point but... if Kaminari is right then... what does that mean for you?"

And Bakugou *finally* understood.

"You're scared."

Kirishima laughed hollowly, "Of course I'm scared. Not only might all this mean that the Heroes weren't always the good guys but... You could go to prison. Be kicked off the Hero course. Be banned from being a Pro." Kirishima looked dangerously close to tears, looking almost as fatigued as Bakugou knew he looked, "I... don't wanna do this without you, man."

Bakugou flushed, irritation hardening his disposition further, “Don’t be fucking stupid - you wanted to be a Hero way before you met me. What happens to me doesn’t mean shit for Red Riot.”

“Fine, but I want that for you too.”

Bakugou stared at the ground, still straddling the rowing machine seat.

“I gotta give my statement tomorrow.” Kirishima finally spoke up again, realising the conversation was effectively over on Bakugou’s end. Kirishima would be a top hero, regardless of what happened to him, and that was that as far as Bakugou was clearly concerned.

“Do me a favour?”

“Of course.”

“Be fucking honest, please?” Bakugou finally looked up to meet his eyes - Kirishima found himself almost physically taken aback by the raw emotion shining in them, “We owe her that.”

“Dude,” Kirishima held out a hand to help him up. Bakugou took it and pushed himself to his feet. “I have nothing to lie about.”

## Chapter End Notes

Thank you again for reading! Have a lovely week :)

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!